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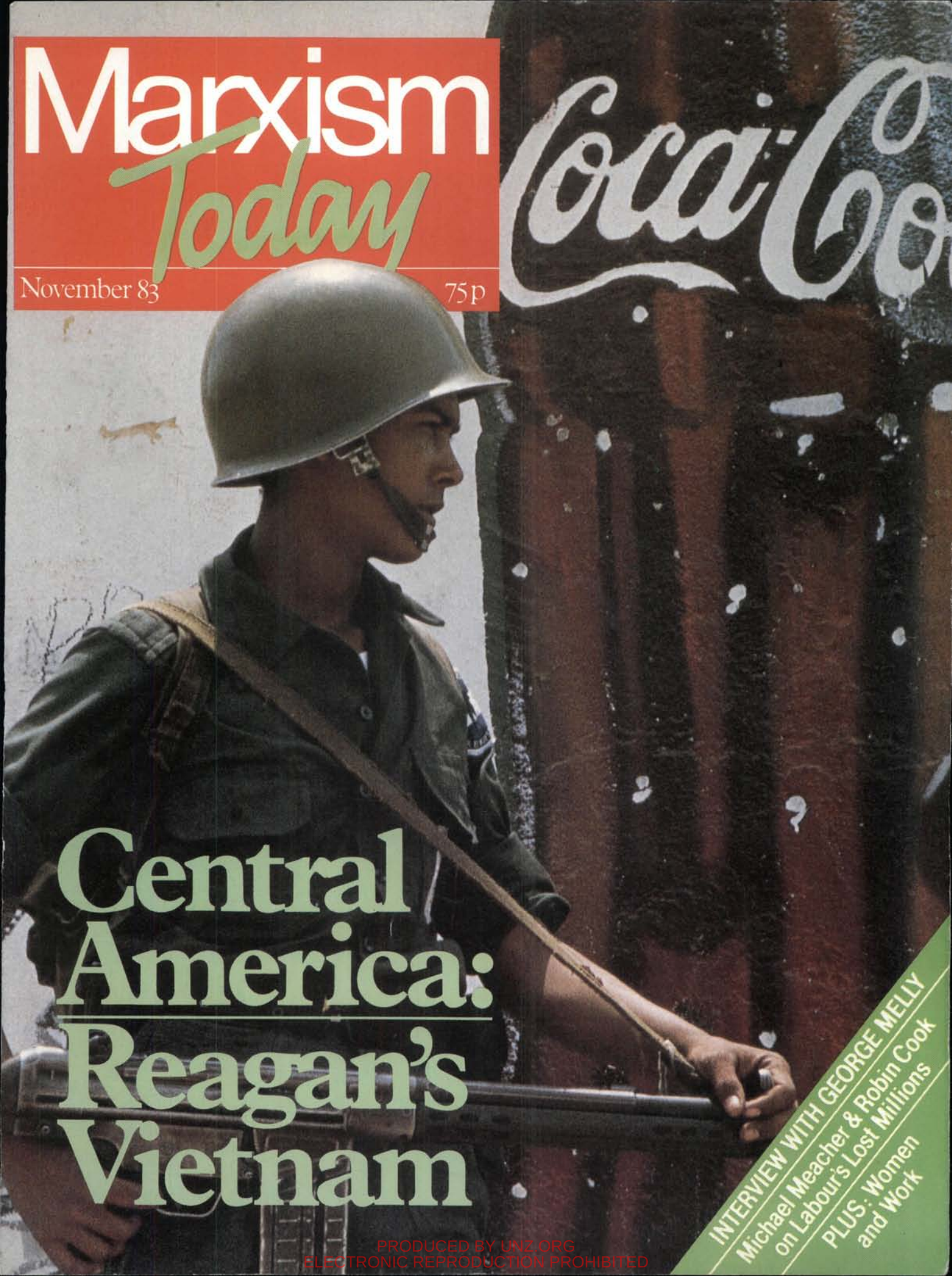

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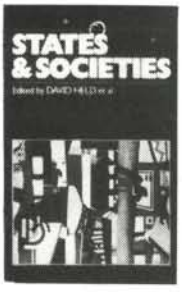

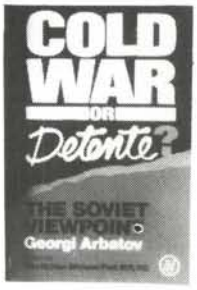

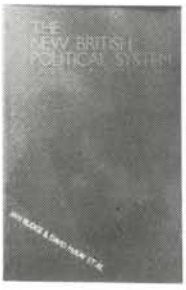

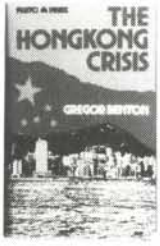

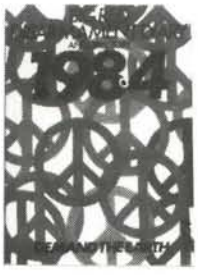

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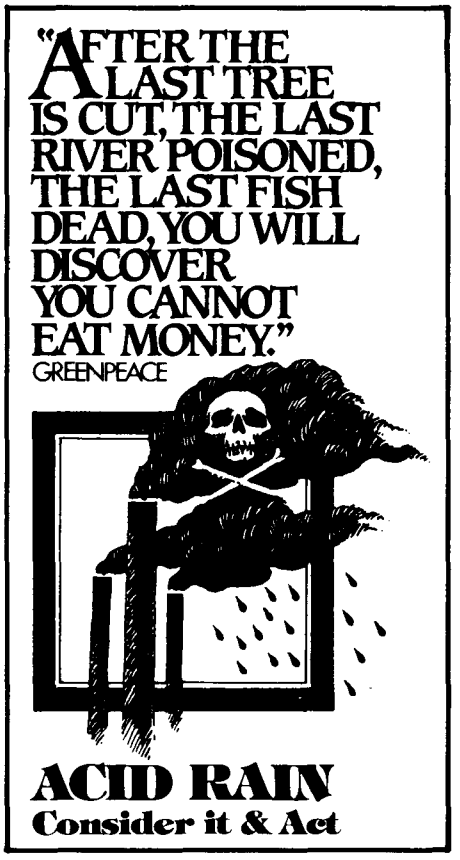
THE RAIN THAT KILLS

Just before the West German elections earlier this year, Chancellor Helmut Kohl announced that his government would be spending up to $5 billion to fight the growing threat of acid rain. The German decision is the most powerful step yet taken against the biggest politico-environmental issue facing the world's industrialised nations. What now remains to be seen is how rapidly other nations will follow suit, for what is clear is that an ecological catastrophe with global consequences is taking place.

This year between 60 and 70 million tonnes of chemical pollutants will spew into the skies over Europe, the direct result of using 'fossil fuels' as an energy source. Although by far the largest quantities will emanate from power stations and heavy industrial plants, fumes from vehicle exhausts and smoke from domestic fires will contribute significantly. The array of pollutants is bewildering, ranging from the major problem components, sulphur and nitrous oxides, to the toxic heavy metals such as lead, mercury and cadmium. Increasingly, the photochemical oxidant ozone is recognised as having an important role. Though the details of the processes that follow atmospheric release of these chemicals are complex and far from being thoroughly understood, the overall consequences are clear — precipitation, whether it be snow, rain, mists or fog, becomes increasingly acidic. Rain as acidic as vinegar or lemon juice has fallen in Europe. Even the average shower in southern England is now anywhere between 10 and 50 times as acidic as it was in the 1930s.

The effects have been disastrous. In areas of thin soils, more especially where the underlying bed-rock already imparts a degree of natural acidity to the area, the ability of the environment to neutralise further acidic input is virtually non-existent and consequently the acidity increases dramatically. In the most susceptible regions the statistics of damage are frightening: 50% of all German pine forest has suffered damage, with two thirds of all her fir trees now diseased. Over 2,000 square miles have been declared totally unproductive zones. What seems to happen is that the overall burden of pollution eventually leads to the death of sensitive yet vital root structures. Increasingly unable to acquire the essential nutrients it needs, the tree suffers what is described as a 'loss of vitality'. It little matters then the form of the final death blow, whether it be fungal attack, viral infection or harsh climatic stress factors such as hard winters, severe gales, or long periods of drought with high temperatures. With its natural defence mechanisms impaired, the tree is doomed, with the resulting de-stabilisation of the entire forest eco-system.

Since the European Community forest products sector employs some 1.4 million workers, just as many as the motor vehicle or textiles industries, the unemployment implications are serious. All the more so


"AFTER THE LAST TREE IS CUT, THE LAST RIVER POISONED, THE LAST FISH DEAD, YOU WILL DISCOVER YOU CANNOT EAT MONEY."
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when damage similar to the German experience has been substantiated in Holland, Czechoslovakia, Poland, Yugoslavia and, most recently, France and Italy. As yet unsubstantiated reports of 90,000 square kilometres of damage in Western Russia only seem to stress the scale of the problem.

The very first signs, however, of a large scale environmental problem in the wind came not from Germany nor from forests, but from Swedish and Norwegian scientists researching aquatic eco-systems. They noted a gradual but accelerating loss of fish and other organisms from lakes and rivers all over southern Scandinavia. By the early 60s they had determined acid rain as the causal factor, and Britain as the main culprit. Following the disastrous smogs in the early 1950s in which thousands of people died, Britain introduced the Clean Air Act 1956 and along with it the 'tall stack' solution to the problem. This involved simply releasing the poisonous chemicals higher up into the air streams and so, they thought, eliminating their effect. What happened instead was that the formative agents of Britain's smog became the exported pre-cursors of Scandinavia's acid rain. As the rain fell, water systems became increasingly acidic. Reproductive ability in fish was impaired; eggs failed to hatch, or the fry developed abnormally. In the same way that children show greater sensitivity to lead in the environment, so the juvenile stages of aquatic life are more susceptible to acidity changes. The acid leaked out poisonous aluminium compounds, especially during 'acidic flushes' associated with the spring snow-melts, precisely the times when many fish enter their breeding cycles. The result is that the lakes become strangely clear, uncannily silent — and fishless. The whole complex infra-structure of the aquatic environment has collapsed. 20,000 lakes in Sweden are losing or have already lost their fish, 5,000 square miles of Norway have suffered a total loss of fish populations; once healthy, productive lakes now produce nothing. The same situation holds in North America, where US estimates place 25 billion dollars worth of resources at risk.

But it is not just wildlife and the forestry that suffer. The US Environmental Protection Agency estimates that acid rain causes 2,000 million dollars worth of damage each year to buildings, statues, paint surfaces and metal structures. It is the same story in Europe. Most of London's historical monuments, along with the Parthenon in Athens, the Colosseum in Rome and the cathedral of Cologne, are seriously damaged. It is clear that human health also suffers. The American Lung Association has documented greatly increased toxicity to sulphur dioxide in asthmatics, the elderly and the very young.

The pressure to act in the light of all this evidence, as the Germans have done, is growing, and growing rapidly. President Reagan has let it be known that he doesn't want 'acid rain' to become an election issue and emission reductions of up to 25-30% are expected to be announced shortly. Denmark too talks of 30% cuts to be announced next year. All this only serves to isolate the greatest polluter of them all as far as Western Europe is concerned: Britain.

Britain's reluctance to move positively on the issue is not complicated. Because of the

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nature of atmospheric pollution, which means that some countries suffer comparatively little and are net exporters of pollution, whilst others who may produce insignificant quantities experience the greatest problems since they lie in the path of other people's pollution, Britain, at least until recently, was thought to have largely escaped damage. There was, thus, little direct pressure from within to employ what are unarguably expensive treatment measures.

Britain also remains uncertain that a direct link exists between sulphur and nitrogen oxide emissions and the rates of acidic deposition. Both of these stances, however, must change in the light of the most recent findings. Firstly Britain is suffering extensive damage herself. Upland lakes and rivers in Wales, Scotland and the Lake District are also reported to be losing their fish stocks; the areas of Galloway and parts of Carmarthen have already done so. Attempts to re-afforest areas of the Pennines are reported to be failing because of acid rain, and Scottish scientists estimate £25 million damage to crop yields.

To add more fuel to the fire, a rather unfortunate pun, Britain's uncertainty that cutting emissions would reduce environmental acidification, tantamount to saying what goes up doesn't come down, is now at direct variance with the most recent findings of President Reagan's advisors on the issue, who have shown clear correlation between emission rates and deposition rates.

It becomes increasingly a question of cost. This is most clearly reflected in the recent disclosure that the Department of Environment had mooted the implementation of de-sulpherisation measures in power stations, only to have the proposals quashed by the Treasury. It has, however, been mandatory for some time now for new power stations to be designed ready to receive de-sulpherisation technology. The Central Electricity Generating Board have estimated it would cost Britain an introductory £4,000 million programme and an annual burden of £700 million from then on. The question of the appropriate measures being economically unjustifiable, though, have already been invalidated by studies undertaken by the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, who have proved that measures can be cost-effective.

Britain's only response so far to the urgent calls for action has been to plump for further research. £5 million has been donated, no strings attached, to further Scandinavian research. Nobody disputes the need for more research, but of much greater urgency is the need to act decisively on what is already known. Britain's stance is becoming increasingly untenable. With two to four million square miles of our planet estimated by the United Nations environmental programme to be already affected, and with the estimated cost to EEC member states reckoned at 3-5% of gross national product, it is becoming increasingly clear that it is not what it will cost us to carry out the necessary measures, but what it is going to cost us if we don't. With environmental organisations gearing themselves up for a major 1984 campaign and the EEC likely to push hard for an integrated community-wide pollution reduction programme, it's a hard rain that's going to fall for Britain in 1984

Robert Taylor

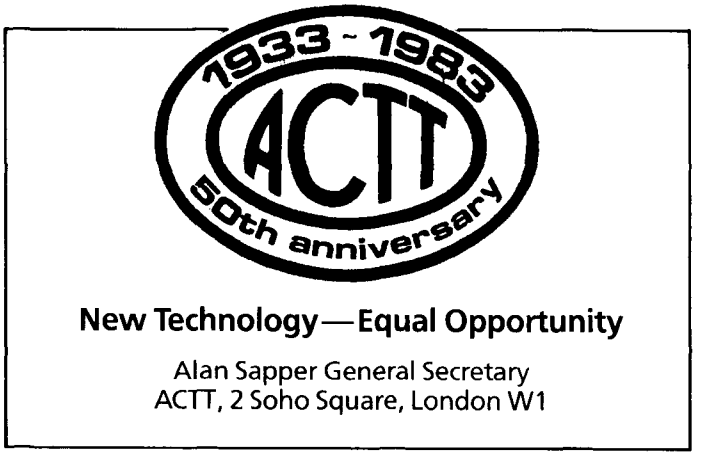
RACISM IN FRANCE

On September 11, 3 National Front (NF) candidates, in alliance with the main right-ing opposition party the RPR, won seats in local council by-elections in the small French industrial town of Dreux, mid-way between Chartres and Paris. The alliance polled 55.3% compared with 44.7% for the Socialist-Communist group. The problem this result revealed goes deeper than the emergence of an electoral alliance between right-wing Republicans and Fascists. British anti-racists cannot but see similarities with this country during the 1970s, when a fascist party masquerading as 'patriotic' tapped a popularist vein of working class racism.

For some time the French Right has been seeking to destabilise the Socialist government by playing on the theme of 'insecurity', the French equivalent of our 'law and order' lobby. Racism has played a major role in this. Until quite recently the various fascist groups concentrated much of their activity on anti-semitic attacks. The bombing of the rue Copernic synagogue in October 1980, claiming 4 dead and 9 injured, and the attack in August 1982 on Goldenberg's restaurant in Paris (6 dead, 22 injured) drew shocked attention to what was a constant level of racist attacks.

This summer *La Semaine*, a journal for Algerian workers in France, recorded six racist killings between mid-June and mid-August, with many more serious injuries. A number of the incidents occured during police 'identity controls', when 'foreign-looking' people were stopped for questioning, or in housing estates where groups of youths have been indiscriminately shot at from balconies. In yet other cases, car-loads of racists have simply attacked the first black person they have come across in a deserted street. Armed citizens' 'vigilante patrols' have been organised in many areas. The NF deputy leader (Stirbois) elected at Dreux has been given a new post in charge of 'public security', and although the precise nature of this post is not yet known, it is likely that he will use it to organise vigilantes.

The largest group of immigrant workers, around 870,000 comes from Portugal, followed by Algerians (817,000) and roughly equal numbers of Italian, Spanish and Moroccans (around 400,000 each).



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There are also smaller Tunisian, Turkish and West African communities. Older still, of course, are the important Jewish and Polish communities dating from the end of the last century. Since immigration ceased in 1974 the immigrant population stabilised at about 6.5% of the total. Most of the North African, Portuguese and Turkish workers are in the building and motor industries, whereas West Africans are concentrated in public services such as street cleaning. Many immigrants also work, frequently on a seasonal or casual basis, in the components industry, agriculture and the ragtrade. The North Africans — Algerians and Moroccans who have been able to secure low-rent high-density housing, often in (hitherto) left-wing districts on the outskirts of the large cities — frequently encounter racism from their neighbours. On the other hand, immigrant workers who are in all-male hostels (especially those from France's West African neo-colonies) live rather more apart from much of the French working class and encounter everyday racism most often at the hands of the state, especially in police identity checks.

After the elections in May 1981 immigrants expected an improvement in their status, and indeed the following October some limited gains were made: marriage between an 'alien' and a French citizen was no longer subject to the endorsement of the Minister of the Interior, 'aliens' could form their own associations, meaning they could organise politically, and arbitrary deportations were ended.

The amnesty for illegal immigrants, however, became bogged down in bureaucratic problems and the rigid criteria employed excluded certain categories like seasonal workers. Many employers sacked immigrants rather than give them the work-contracts they needed to get official papers. In fact the 'amnesty' operation left many immigrant workers still without papers and in a much less secure position than before. Just before the Dreux election, Secretary of State Mme Dufoix announced new measures against illegal immigrants who, it was said, made it more difficult for 'regular' immigrants to become integrated. Three days after the Dreux election, on September 15, the all-too-familiar 'identity controls' by police began again: in rue Saint-Denis, in the centre of Paris, all 'foreign-looking people' were stopped for papers and held for computer checks if they had none on them.

It seems that the government is playing straight into the hands of the racists. During the municipal elections last March they decided not to 'risk' using a rather anodyne poster exhorting French and immigrants to 'live in harmony together'. The recent clampdown on illegal immigrants, while further 'integrating' and improving conditions for those with 'regular' status, is another divisive measure.

On the centre-right the neo-Gaullists (UDF) remain divided between supporters of Simone Weil who preferred to lose a municipal by-election to the Left rather than ally with fascists, and those who try to pass the NF off as simply excessively chauvinistic. Jacques Chirac, Mayor of Paris and the most dynamic figure of the main opposition RPR, described the NF as a 'natural ally' on TV shortly after the Dreux election. 'Three members of the extreme Right in Dreux pose less of a threat than four Communists in government', he proclaimed.

Meanwhile, at the recent 'fete' of the 'merely chauvinistic' NF large numbers of *Memoires of a Fascist*, by Lucien Rebatel (who was the editor of the pro-nazi *Je suis partout*) were sold, as were the books of revisionist historian Faurisson, who seeks to rehabilitate the Third Reich. Ominously, there have been talks about an alliance between the NF and another extreme-right group the PFN (Party of the New Force). The latter is currently organising a series of countrywide meetings against immigrants, allowing the NF to concentrate on elections. The extreme Right looks set to become a significant force in French elections.

Cathy Lloyd

NIGERIA COMES OF AGE

Last month Nigeria celebrated its 23rd anniversary. It was also a celebration of survival. The four year old political system, an adaptation of the presidential system, had just carried Nigeria the nation through the major test of elections. There was, as was widely reported, chaos and disorder. The elections were free, a commentator wrote, but they were not fair. However, the Shagari administration now has another four years to pursue its goal of development.

Nigerian politicians talk obsessively about catching up with the West. Unfortunately, this rambling mass of land which can be divided into three major ethnic groups and a huge number of different languages, and which numbers over 100 million people, is most definitely trapped in the Third World.

Six years after independence in 1960 the country experienced an attempted secession. Thirteen years of military rule

Alhaji Shehu Shagari

followed. The last four years was therefore a renewed experiment in democracy. The government is young, not only because its principal actors are young, but also because they have a short history of self government.

There are a whole range of sources of conflict. Nigeria could be three nations. The British created, by political imposition, the politico-geographical entity called Nigeria. It was ethnic rivalry over the spoils of state which almost destroyed the first republic. The ruling classes from the regions simply couldn't decide how to distribute resources in an equitable manner between themselves. Being rulers of their own 'nations', they were able to rally their subjects by appeals to a common belonging, as an expression of their disagreements.

The last 23 years might be interpreted as a lesson in being a Nigerian. The most recent manifestation of this growing sense of nationalism was the expulsion of the Ghanaian immigrants in February. However, this was overshadowed by the inefficient and shambolic way in which the exercise was carried out. Many Africans condemned the expulsion, which was seen as a betrayal of the long tradition of pan-Africanism which gave birth to the Organisation of African Unity. Being Nigerian was clearly incompatible with African brotherhood.

But Ghanaians are just one group of people who have flocked to Nigerian cities. Nigerians themselves form a strong migrant group. Alongside the international airports and hotels, the express railways and air conditioned offices are the migrants, who live precarious lives selling cigarettes, pop drink, Kola nut — strong in caffeine — fried meat, fried fish and fried yam on kerbside fires. The economists call this the

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informal sector, and it is growing at a rapid pace in Nigeria, creating new sources of tension.

In trying to catch up with the West, Nigeria has imported western technology. Industrialise, industrialise is the message. But western technology, which represents over a century of constant refinement so as to reduce the input of labour, seems wholly incongruous with the fact of Nigeria's abundant labour supply.

For despite its oil wealth, Nigeria is still a Third World country, an exporter of primary products. Its manufacturing base is small, and is dependent on the West not only for machinery but in some instances for physical raw materials. Nigeria does, however, have its own steel industry, which is central to industrialisation. But competition from foreign steel manufacturers — and this is the case with most Nigerian products — who sell cheaper and possibly better quality steel could destroy the industry. The textile industry based mainly in the north is constantly suffering under the impact of foreign competition. In fact a genuine manufacturing base is relatively absent from Nigeria. Simultaneously with Nigeria's failure to develop an industrial base, ex-military officers have turned farmers. Along with an increasing number of businessmen, they are transforming the face of the Nigerian countryside. The machine and the new relations between workers and the land has become a pervasive force in precipitating migration to the cities.

Lagos, Nibadon, Port Harcourt, Benin, Warri, Sokoto, Maiduguiri, Kaduna and Kanot are cities bursting at the seams with workers that cannot be formally employed. These migrants bear the remnants of their feudal past as they troop into the cities.

In Northern Nigeria, Islam dominates cultural life. It dictates the pattern of work. Nonbelievers and Christians are ill-advised to transgress their codes. Women have been known to be stoned if they walked past muslim men in prayer.

Occasionally muslims go on the rampage. One year they burnt down the staff club, which sold alcohol, in a northern university. In December 1980 a charismatic Cameroonian migrant led a sect of muslims into an attack on non-muslims in several northern cities. The rioters were reputed to have gone for people who lived in upstairs houses, wore watches, certain types of shoes or drove a car. It was a rebellion against modernity.

The root cause can found in the main participants. They existed on the fringe of the city. They service those who live in the Government Reserve Areas where the ex-colonials used to live, the big Alhajis in their flowing white robes, Italian shoes, Parisian briefcases, Swiss watches, German cars and a house in Kensington. Inequality breeds discontent, and in Nigeria discontent is not simply expressed through economic organisations such as trade unions, but also in religious and ethnic forms, organisations and movements.

Inequality is fed by corruption, which pervades from the minor official to high ranking ministers and civil servants. Public offices are everywhere used for private gains. At the interface of the international and domestic economy personal gains running into millions are common. Corruption, some Nigerian and foreign businessmen believe, helps to oil the state's efficiency. It permeates through the society, so much so that President Shagari has had to call for 'ethical revolution'. A code of conduct bureau has been established. Today it is still struggling to gain the co-operation of ministers and top public officials.

Nigeria is chaotic, disorderly, conflict ridden. It is also a society in transition, from feudalism to capitalism, from a number of small states to a larger nation state, from colonialism to independence, from the traditional to the modern.

Ferdi Dennis

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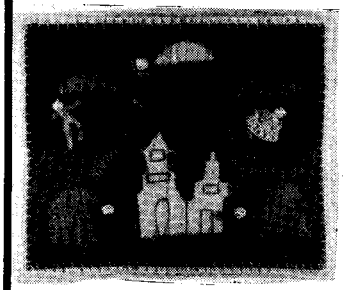

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In the face of failure after failure, the US is edging closer and closer to direct military involvement. But not yet.

Jenny Pearce

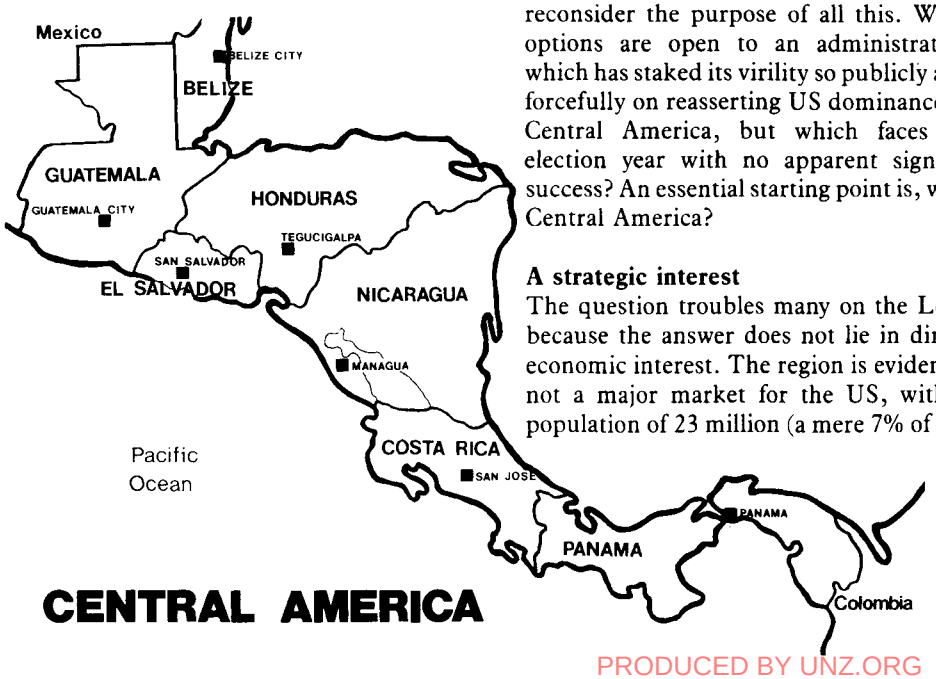
Central America: The Eagle Hovers

THE *WASHINGTON POST* recently reminded its readers that El Salvador and Nicaragua are what Lyndon B Johnson used to call 'pisant' countries. Most US citizens don't need reminding. Opinion polls not only reveal a quite extraordinary ignorance of the countries, but the most recent showed that only 8% of the sample knew which side, government or insurgents, the US was backing in each case.

But the Reagan administration has chosen these tiny Central American republics as the main focus of its foreign policy. Indeed, it has been trying for almost three years to persuade the US public that the very future of US power is at stake in Central America. In the latest edition of *Foreign Policy*, Nestor D Sanchez, deputy assistant secretary of defence for inter-American affairs, spells out the threat: '. . . Americans are now finding it difficult to accept the fact that the Soviet Union is abetting an assault on the security of this hemisphere more dangerous than the postwar threat to Western Europe. The conflict in El Salvador represents merely one step of an attempt to absorb the closest neighbors of the United States into what President Ronald Reagan has called "the most aggressive empire the modern world has seen".'

The arguments — or rather the rhetoric — have failed to convince. This more than any other factor explains why US troops are not yet on Central American soil. But it has not stopped the administration from edging nearer and nearer such an eventuality. This month joint manoeuvres will take place close to the Nicaraguan border between the Honduran and US armed forces; they are part of Operation Big Pine II which was launched in August. The scale of the manoeuvres is unprecedented. They will involve 4,000 US army and marine troops and 19 ships with several thousand crew. They will last at least six months. By comparison, Operation Big Pine I which took place in February of this year, involved 'only' 1,600 US troops and lasted two weeks.

It is an appropriate moment to pause and reconsider the purpose of all this. What options are open to an administration which has staked its virility so publicly and forcefully on reasserting US dominance in Central America, but which faces an election year with no apparent sign of success? An essential starting point is, why Central America?



A strategic interest

The question troubles many on the Left, because the answer does not lie in direct economic interest. The region is evidently not a major market for the US, with a population of 23 million (a mere 7% of the total population of Latin America) and a *per capita* income of US $472 (compared to US $1,964 for Latin America as a whole). Inter-state rivalries and civil war have rendered the Central American Common Market moribund. Less than 2% of total US exports and imports travel between the regions.

Nor is the region an important outlet for direct US investment. Total US investment in Latin America in 1979 was US $38 billion but only 1 billion of it has headed for Central America (excluding Panama), a mere 2.5% of total US investment in Latin America. The most characteristic movement of capital in relation to Central America is away from it. Capital flight is estimated at over US$ 2.5 billion in the last three years. Such is the economic devastation in the region that the UN Economic Commission for Latin America has estimated that it needs US $20 billion over the next five years to avoid total economic and financial collapse. Central America cannot be considered of economic interest to the US or anyone else in the medium term.

The most obvious explanation for US interest is therefore strategic rather than economic.

The most obvious explanation for US interest is therefore strategic rather than economic. For most of this century and beyond, Central America together with the islands of the Caribbean has occupied a special place in US strategic thinking. In no other part of the world did the US intervene 28 times between 1900 and 1930. In this period the US gradually extended its informal empire in the Caribbean basin, expelling the rival European powers and establishing its own exclusive sphere of influence. Central America's geographical position close to the US mainland on the

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one side and the commercially and strategically vital interoceanic canal route on the other, sealed its fate as the United States fourth frontier. By the time the US began its rise to power on the global stage, stability and US domination in the region, organised through proxy dictators or oligarchic alliances was assured.

Undoubtedly, the particular strategic importance of this region, coupled with cold war ideology, has had a powerful influence on the US foreign policy-making establishment. This is so, despite the fact that there is no evidence that the Soviet Union is fomenting revolution there. The US has the most sophisticated surveillance equipment in the world, and has mounted an intelligence operation in the region which the *New York Times* has described as the 'most ambitious paramilitary and political action operation mounted by the CIA in nearly a decade' but has provided no convincing evidence that either the Soviet Union or Cuba or Nicaragua are channelling arms to the Salvadorean guerillas. Nor does the suggestion that the Soviet Union seeks bases in this region make much sense in an era of intercontinental ballistic missiles.

The reverses in US global power and prestige have fuelled the sense of insecurity on which the forces of the Right breed.

The Soviet-threat-to-a-strategic-area explanation operates at the most subjective level of US administration consciousness where cold war ideology may well have some explanatory power of its own. But it does not satisfy those who seek to understand the material forces behind this ideology and the dynamics of the US imperial state.[1] Nor does it fully explain why Central America has taken on a significance for this administration well beyond its own geographical boundaries, dashing the hopes of those who expected a negotiated settlement sooner rather than later.

Decline of US power

It is within the broader context of the relative economic and military decline of US power over the last decade or more that the full importance of Central America emerges. The US imperial state functions to facilitate the movement of US capital round the globe; keeping states open to externally induced accumulation has been one of its most important military and economic tasks in the postwar era. The credibility of US power has become essential to this role. National liberation movements and others who challenge it must believe that the US will respond in a way they cannot ignore. The credible threat of US military intervention and/or economic sanctions must encourage them to accommodate ultimately to US interests.

In the 1970s a succession of revolutionary upheavals in the Third World, beginning with the defeat in Vietnam and eventually taking in the Horn of Africa, Southern Africa, Central Asia and Central America seriously challenged US invincibility. By the late 1970s, Henry Kissinger was lamenting: 'we are sliding towards a world out of control, with our relative military power declining, with our economic lifeline increasingly vulnerable to blackmail, with hostile radical forces growing in every continent, and with the number of countries willing to stake their future on our friendship dwindling'.

The decline in US power is real on every front, not just in relation to its influence in the Third World. The US share of world GNP declined from 40% in 1950 to 20% in 1980; its share of manufacturing output and of world trade has steadily fallen. And the world recession has exacerbated inter-state tensions and rivalries and further threatened the stable world order on which US supremacy was built after the second world war. The reverses in US global power and prestige have fuelled the sense of insecurity in which the forces of the Right breed. Cold war ideology offers an explanation for these reverses which has a distinctly popular appeal. Radical Third World regimes are threatening because of their implications for US business interests and access to raw materials and markets. But the aspiration of a nation to control its own resources is hardly illegitimate. Cold war ideology delegitimises these regimes which it explains in terms of a global struggle between the 'free world' and the 'communist bloc'. The Soviet Union, it claims, takes advantage of local unrest to overthrow pro-US governments and replace them with pro-Soviet ones. Once this is viewed cumulatively, the global balance of power is at risk and each local disturbance in the Third World becomes part of the East-West conflict and US intervention is a justified act of national defence.

This collective farm not far from Managua is working land that had been left derelict by its previous owner, President Somoza.

Reagan's Central American strategy

Ronald Reagan took over the presidency deeply imbued with this world view and deeply committed not just to reversing the United States' declining fortunes but to reasserting American power. Where better to flex the administration's muscles and make the first stand for resurgent America than in the United States' own backyard? El Salvador, where the FMLN guerillas launched an offensive to coincide with Reagan's inauguration in January 1981, seemed the perfect 'test case' to halt the tide of revolution in the Third World. The pacification of the United States' own backyard was seen by the administration as an essential step towards the restoration of its credibility as a world power. But the defeat of the FMLN in El Salvador was not enough. The Sandinista government in Nicaragua represented a permanent challenge to US influence in the region, undermining its authority by virtue of the alternative, independent path of development it represented as well as offering a potential base of support for other opposition movements in the region. Thus, early on the administration linked the defeat of the FMLN to the removal of the Sandinista government in its regional strategy. Secretary of State Haig declared: 'although the Marxist government in Nicaragua might fall eventually of its own failure, the security of El Salvador requires the acceleration of the removal of the government in Managua.

In neither case did the Reagan administration consider its task a difficult one. It dismissed the guerilla movement as Soviet-backed gunslingers with little popular support. They could be eliminated fairly rapidly with a consignment of US arms and advisers. Economic pressure was consid-

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May Day rally — Managua, Nicaragua.

ered sufficient to undermine the flimsy base of support of the Sandinistas. The administration confidently gave maximum public exposure to its Central American policy in expectation of a quick and glorious victory.

The miscalculation was a serious one. Not only was the FMLN in El Salvador able to consolidate control over at least a third of the country in the course of 1981 but the Sandinistas remained extremely popular within Nicaragua and won the diplomatic and economic support of many western European governments and other Latin American states. As a result, the administration was forced to shift its strategy towards the end of 1981, dramatically increasing its military assistance to the Salvadorean army and launching a CIA covert operation to destabilise the Sandinista government which included the arming and training of exiled members of ex-President Somoza's National Guard based in Honduras.

Failure and escalation

The subsequent pattern of US intervention in Central America has been determined by the consistent failure of these and other initiatives against the FMLN and the Sandinista government. Administration policy has followed the pace of events in a fairly *ad hoc* manner which has drawn it into deeper and deeper military involvement in the region. US military assistance to El Salvador rose from US $35 million in the 1981 fiscal year to US $81 million in 1982, while during the course of 1982, Honduras was turned into a virtual US army base from which the administration carried out its military plans for the region. This has resulted in increasing tensions between Nicaragua and Honduras as the Nicaraguans have seen their neighbour turned into a base of operations directed at overthrowing their government.

But the US appeared no nearer its objectives in the region by the end of 1982. On the contrary, a FMLN offensive in October had given the guerillas the military initiative in the war. They showed growing capacity to fight regular as opposed to guerilla warfare. More than once they engaged in a war of position, for the first time using heavy artillery captured from the army. The Salvadorean army appeared to be disintegrating before them. US military advisers in the country complained bitterly about its incompetence: 'Our military advisers down there are screaming bloody murder', one administration official told *Newsweek*. 'The army is using the wrong tactics, morale is near zero and the commanders are fighting each other instead of the enemy'.

Early in 1983, William Clark, Reagan's National Security Adviser and a man dedicated to pleasing his master's every whim, began to interest himself in Central America. He dispatched Jeane Kirkpatrick on a fact-finding mission and she returned with alarming reports of growing Soviet influence in the region. A policy review followed and the administration moved into a new phase of toughened response. Over the ensuing months, the administration was purged of its dissenters. Ender, the Assistant-Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs, who had advocated a two-track policy combining increased military assistance with diplomatic initiatives, finally lost his post in May. Central American policy was placed firmly in the hands of the uncompromising right wing ideologues: William Casey at the CIA, Jeane Kirkpatrick at the UN, Richard Stone who was appointed special envoy to Central America, and in particular William Clark. In addition, certain lesser-known names at the Pentagon emerged, notably Nestor Sanchez quoted earlier, and Fred Ikle, Under Secretary of Defence for Policy. Both are political appointees reputed to have the ear of Casper Weinberger who had been too concerned with budgetary and other matters to involve himself with Central America.

In March the administration made a request for a further US $110 million in emergency military assistance to El Salvador and began a vigorous campaign to win public and congressional support for its policy. In April, Reagan made his speech to the joint session of Congress, making clear that those who failed to vote the necessary funds would later be held responsible for 'losing' this vital region. At the same time Faith Ryan Whittlesey of the Office of Public Liaison was put in charge of a unit aimed at winning public approval for the administration's Central America policy called the Central America Policy Outreach Programme: 'Every businessman who asks me about natural gas or consumer productivity I ask to help us on Central America', she stated.

The contras

Within Central America the covert operation against the Sandinista government also entered a new phase. In February, 1,200 former members of ex-President Somoza's National Guard or *contras* as they are known, picked up weapons conveniently left behind after Operation Big Pine 1 and invaded Nicaragua from their camps in Honduras. During 1982, CIA training and weapons had turned this assortment of counter-revolutionaries dedicated to the overthrow of the Sandinistas by whatever means into a fairly efficient and well-equipped fighting force. By June, their numbers inside Nicaragua had swollen to some 5,000.

The US also set up a new training camp in Honduras, staffed with 125 US officers, to train two new battalions of the Salvadorean army. In May a new army offensive was launched in El Salvador in the San Vicente and Usulatan provinces modelled on the military-civic action programme known in Vietnam as CORDS. Its objective was to clear the economically important provinces of guerillas and win back the peasantry with reconstruction programmes and food aid. The 47 US advisers, mostly Vietnam veterans, were now virtually running the campaigns of the Salvadorean army. On 29 May, the *Philadephia Inquirer* ran a headline: 'How US advisers run the war in

[1] I am grateful to James Petras for his work on the imperial state, cf J Petras *et al.* *Class, State and Power in the Third World* Zed Press 1981.

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El Salvador'.

But by the end of June, none of these initiatives had produced tangible results. The *contras* caused considerable damage and loss of life, but they had not been able to take a single town in Nicaragua. It soon became apparent that they would not succeed in creating a liberated zone in northern Nicaragua which would enable the US at some stage to pursue a double negotiation in which the *contras* would be compared to the FMLN in El Salvador. In El Salvador, the 'hearts and minds' campaign in San Vicente and Usulatan had brought apparent initial success as the guerillas were forced out of the target areas, but they had merely retreated tactically and had not been defeated in combat. Meanwhile, Congress had not yet voted all the emergency military assistance and was about to debate the Boland-Zablocki bill to cut off the covert assistance to the *contras*.

The Kissinger Commission

On 8 July a new policy review took place. An inter-agency report was presented to the National Security Council which was subsequently leaked to the *New York Times*. It began: 'the situation in Central America is nearing a critical point . . . it is still possible to accomplish US objectives without the direct use of US troops (although the credible threat of such use is needed to deter overt Soviet/Cuban intervention) provided that the US takes timely and effective action'. Amongst the report's recommendations were a 40% increase in military aid, pre-positioning of US military equipment in Honduras for the event of a major crisis, continued covert operations against Nicaragua together with attempts to isolate the Sandinistas diplomatically, and appointment of a bipartisan commission on US policy towards Central America.

Vietnam haunts the Pentagon, particularly the military staff.

Two main objectives seem to have emerged from the review. On the one hand the need to reassure Congress and the public that the US was pursuing a firm but flexible policy in Central America and on the other, to send a strong message to Nicaragua, Cuba and the Soviet Union that the administration would use force to protect US interests if necessary. These objectives were translated into the Kissinger Commission, a bipartisan commission as recommended by the inter-agency report, and the announcement of Operation Big Pine II with the dispatch of the 19 ship task force to the Atlantic and Pacific coasts of Nicaragua.

The Kissinger Commission was charged with recommending a long term plan for Central America capable of winning bipartisan support. It was packed with conservative establishment figures and, with Kissinger at its head, will clearly produce the report that Reagan wants. Kissinger's own views on Central America are known to be close to Reagan's, though should Reagan be forced to seek some way out of an impasse he is likely to provide that too.[2] In an election year (the Commission is due to report in February), the Commission will serve to mute the opposition to Reagan's Central America policy, giving Democrats and liberal Republicans a forum to express their concern with policy without taking the blame for 'losing' Central America.

Differences within the government

But the effect of the establishment of the Commission was somewhat overshadowed by the announcement of Operation Big Pine II which reinforced the military emphasis of administration policy. The announcement however, highlighted the concern at the direction of policy from within the major government agencies. The official explanation for naval and military exercises was indications that Cuba and the Soviet Union were preparing major military moves in Nicaragua. But not everyone in the CIA agreed with the assessment and officials admitted to the press that there was not hard evidence of such moves. Within the State Department and the Pentagon middle ranking officers lobbied their bosses against the exercises and when they failed to stop them, they leaked the news to the press. Their concern was that a substantial US military presence in the region would increase the risk of US troops getting drawn into a regional war, should the tensions between Honduras and Nicaragua break out into open conflict as they have threatened to do more than once in the past.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff are known to oppose direct US involvement in Central America without consensus at home. Vietnam haunts the Pentagon particularly the military staff. But the capacity of the Salvadorean army to score any major victory against the guerillas looks increasingly remote. In October, the FMLN resurfaced in San Vicente which the army claimed to have cleared of guerillas. The army's ineffectual leadership and failure to adopt the small-unit actions and night patrols advocated by the US resembles more and more the failings of the South Vietnamese army. Vietnam too began with a few US advisers who found the local army unable to do the job. The Pentagon has continued to press for large increases in military assistance to the Salvadorean army as the only way for present policies to succeed without the dispatch of US troops. But it has also argued that a partial disengagement from the region would be less damaging to US interests than continuing present policies without congressional approval of the necessary funds.

History is at present with the 'reassertionists'.

The response of the administration to these doubts has been to make renewed efforts to win the necessary congressional support. But so far that has been conditional on some sign that the administration is pursuing diplomatic initiatives as well as military ones in the region. This has proved difficult for the administration to sustain. Richard Stone, Reagan's special envoy in Central America, began procedural talks about talks with the FMLN/FDR in late July. But these soon broke down when it became clear that the administration was intent on dividing the Salvadorean opposition and wooing the 'moderate' elements into participating in elections in 1984 while it continued the military campaign against the guerillas.

Similarly in Nicaragua, the Reagan administration has made it clear that dialogue involves the Sandinistas acknowledging the strength of the *contras* and holding elections in which the Right would have the chance to regain power. It has become increasingly evident that Reagan seeks a change in the composition of the Sandinista government; he has stated publicly that it would be 'extremely difficult' to deal with the Nicaraguan government as at present constituted. In September *contra* attacks, including an unprecedented air attack on Managua, were stepped up. The CIA has talked of increasing the *contra* force now estimated at 10,000 to 15,000. At the same time, discussions were held in September to revive CONDECA, the regional military alliance between Guatemala, Honduras and El Salvador which would further isolate Nicaragua and bring the danger of regional war closer. In addition to the military pressure, the US has kept up its relentless hostility on the economic front, resulting in the freezing of US $50 million from the World Bank and US £182

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million from the front Inter-American Development Bank. The adminstration, moreover, has acknowledged that it is considering plans for a 'quarantine' of Nicaragua through a naval blockade which would cut off essential oil supplies.

A new offensive

In a key statement of intent, which had the support of all within the administration except the State Department, Fred Ikle gave a speech to the Baltimore Council on Foreign Affairs on 12 September in which he reaffirmed his government's commitment to a military solution in Central America. 'We do not seek a military defeat for our friends. We do not seek a military stalemate. We seek victory for the forces of democracy . . . We must prevent consolidation of a Sandinista regime in Nicaragua that would become an arsenal for insurgency, a safe haven for the export of violence. If we cannot prevent that, we have to anticipate the partition of Central America. Such a development would then force us to man a new military front-line of the East-West conflict, right here on our continent'.

The message is unequivocal. It was made in the wake of the Korean airliner incident and was clearly directed at congress, in an attempt to exploit the strong anti-Soviet feeling following that incident. Ikle blamed Congress in his speech for failing to give the President the means for his policy to succeed. The assault on Congress is clearly a major administration objective in the months ahead. Its task is not easy, but it should be remembered that despite opposition, Congress has voted substantial amounts of military assistance to El Salvador and is likely to grant at least US $64.8 million in military aid for the coming fiscal year compared to an administration request of US $86.3 million. The Democrats have failed to come up with any coherent alternative to the Reagan policy on Central America. They are divided amongst themselves on the issue, with few people willing to take responsibility for winding down support for the Salvadorean army and even fewer willing to defend the Sandinista government. Indeed, positive support for the Sandinistas is decidedly absent in the public opposition to Reagan's policies, which is mostly a negative reaction to the fear of US troops getting dragged into another foreign adventure.

Alternative scenarios

The most coherent policy alternative comes from the 'neo-realists' in the foreign policy-making establishment. In April this year, a group of them including David Rockefeller, Cyrus Vance, Edmund Muskie and Sol Linowitz as well as some prestigious Latin American figures, produced a document entitled *The Americas at the Crossroads*. The report reflected the group's view that the Latin American debt crisis and the economic problems of the region are by far the greatest challenge to US-Latin American relations. On Central America they recommend dialogue between all parties based on the principles of national sovereignty, self-determination and non-intervention and support for the *Contadora* initiative. Other 'neo-realist' thinkers in the US have talked of a 'Zimbabwe Solution' for El Salvador. Behind the 'neo-realist' view is a belief that America must face up to its reduced role on the world stage and devise what Richard Feinberg calls in his recent book[3] 'alternative ways of interpreting and defending US interests'. 'The setbacks in Central America', he argues, 'are the consequences of policies based on false assumptions regarding American influence, the nature of Third World politics and the imperatives of our national interest. We are overestimating our ability to control events in other countries even in small nearby ones'.

But the 'neo-realists' are not in power; their most influential period was in the early Carter years and it proved notoriously ephemeral. History is at present with the 'reassertionists'. All the signs are that they are determined to press on resolutely to suppress the worker and peasant struggles in Central America and to bring down the only genuinely popular government in the region. Reagan is clearly unable to commit troops to Central America in election year; he has placed his hopes on achieving some tangible success in his policy of indirect involvement through support for surrogate armies in the region, and the threat of force. In the process the US has unleashed extreme right wing forces in Central America, who even if the US were to back out now, would carry the war on regardless, prolonging the bloodshed and misery of the region's population.

> In such circumstances, even US marines could not guarantee victory.

There are no guarantees however, that even with vastly increased military assistance, US policies can succeed in Central America. A second Republican administration will almost certainly have to confront the issue of direct involvement in the region or accepting defeat of its stated objectives. Whatever the final outcome, it should be remembered that imperialism can be defeated. There is an explosive social situation in all countries of Central America and an experienced guerilla movement in at least three countries. In such circumstances, even US marines could not guarantee victory. □

Civilians on the street for the first time in five days after intense fighting between army and guerillas in Usulatan.

[2] eg, 'If we cannot manage Central America, it will be impossible to convince threatened nations in the Persian Gulf and in other places that we know how to manage the global equilibrium. We will face a series of upheavals . . . it escapes me why we have to apply the Brezhnev Doctrine in Central America and assert that any Communist government that has established itself can never be changed.' Henry Kissinger quoted in *New York Times* 24/7/83.

[3] R Feinberg, *The Intemperate Zone: The Third World Challenge to US Foreign Policy*, WW Norton Y Company inc New York 1983.

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Owen wants to shift the Alliance to the right, but the Liberals will be a very unwilling partner.

Andrew Gamble

The Uneasy Alliance

THE SDP CONFERENCE AT SALFORD was a muted affair, more like a fringe meeting of one of the three major parties than a gathering of the representatives of a major new mass political force in British politics. Before the election the SDP could claim to be an equal partner in the Alliance because it had more than twice as many MPs as the Liberals. The election reduced its parliamentary representation from 30 to 6 while the number of Liberal MPs rose to 17. Party membership has fallen back since the Falklands War and now seems stuck at around 60,000 about a third of the Liberal figure. It is well represented in the intelligentsia but its social base is extremely narrow. Though it now has policies, it has no traditions or ideology on which its leaders can draw to arouse and enthuse their supporters.

Unlike many previous breakaways the SDP did survive the test of a general election, but mainly because of its alliance with the Liberals. With the demise of its collective leadership David Owen is the major asset which the party now has. During the election he received highly flattering attention from sections of the Tory press, hailed as 'the Flying Doctor' (after he took a helicopter trip) and the only politician who could rival Margaret Thatcher's populist style. His contempt for Roy Jenkins' indecisive campaign was barely concealed and as soon as the election was over he ensured Jenkins departed swiftly. The party is now his party. He is the unquestioned leader and has no serious rival.

The future relationship

But as a vehicle for his ambition the SDP is a rather weak instrument. Trying to project himself as the real Leader of the Opposition with a parliamentary following of only 6 will not be easy. The party can expect some reinforcement from byelection successes and some comfort from local election results. But to be taken at all seriously as a contender for power the SDP will be forced to maintain the Alliance with the Liberals. While the Liberals would certainly survive without the SDP the SDP would struggle to survive without the Liberals. Two years experience as Foreign Secretary is a poor substitute for 2,000 Liberal councillors and 200,000 Liberal members.

One of the central themes dominating discussion in Salford was therefore the future relationship of the Liberals and the SDP. There is a strong current of opinion in the party that there should be an eventual merger of the two parties. Roy Jenkins keeps talking of the very narrow ideological divide between the two. Owen, however, is determined that the two parties remain separate. Personal ambition no doubt plays a part in this. Owen could not hope to rise to leadership in the Liberal Party. Parties often retain deep suspicion of those who join from elsewhere. But still more important is the fact that Social Democrats like Owen deeply mistrust many aspects of the Liberal Party and its policies and would not be comfortable in such an organisation, which in several respects has developed constitutional arrangements similar to those in the Labour Party from which the SDP leaders fled. The SDP is a more centralised party than the Liberals and much more oriented to parliament and government.

Tensions amongst Liberals

The weakness of the SDP relative to their Alliance partners received considerable comment from Liberals during the conferences. David Penhaligon stated that the SDP would have to merge with the Liberals in the next four years or the parties would have to start fighting each other. Michael Meadowcroft doubted that there was any room for the SDP in the British political spectrum — he argued that they would be unable to find a clear separate identity. In this case too the logic of the SDP's position points towards merger.

Most Liberals believe a merger is probable but they are divided on whether it is desirable. Some think the Liberals will swallow the Social Democrats, others fear that the creation of an Alliance party will force the Liberals to sacrifice some aspects of their policies and their identity. This explains some of the tension between David Steel and rank and file Liberals. Steel's objectives are viewed with suspicion because the alliance with the SDP looks a convenient device for distancing the Liberal programme from the policies accepted by the Liberal Assembly. The joint statement on policy under which the Liberals fought the election appeared to many Liberals to jettison or tone down many central Liberal commitments. Liberals are deeply suspicious of the SDP as a highly centralised and parliamentary party. Much of the strength of post war Liberalism has lain not in its parliamentary representation but in its ability to become a vehicle for new forms of social protest and community action.

SDP leaders clearly regard the Liberal *Party* as distinct from the Liberal leadership as unreliable coalition partners. They suspect the Liberal rank and file of not wanting power, not being prepared to accept the compromises on policy and the 'discipline' which power involves. Many Liberals they suspect would prefer to remain a party of protest and not make the attempt to present themselves as a party of government. David Steel, however, has consistently tried to shift the orientation of the party towards becoming a governing party again. His readiness to agree the Lib-Lab pact and his support for the alliance with the SDP have been aimed at widening the space for centre politics in Britain. The goal of full Liberal participation in government has come appreciably closer, but remains tantalisingly elusive. The Liberals stay trapped by the electoral system and though their percentage of the vote has risen substantially since 1951 the breakthrough in parliamentary representation has still not yet come.

Joint selection

Both the Liberal leadership and the SDP want the Alliance to continue but both are aware of the difficulties that lie ahead. Selecting candidates is the most contentious issue. The Liberals want joint selection in future in all constituencies. The SDP voted decisively against joint selection — they fear their smaller and less experienced membership would quickly be swamped

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wherever the Liberals have a strong constituency organisation. The Liberals, however, are unwilling to divide up constituencies with the SDP as they did for the 1983 election, since this means requiring many established Liberal constituency parties to give up their right to nominate their own candidates.

It is not easy to see how the problem can be resolved. In practice the SDP may be forced to concede joint selection of candidates on the ground while remaining opposed to it in principle. This is likely to confirm Liberal ascendancy and make it much more likely that the Liberals will again emerge as the largest party in the Alliance after the next election. If the SDP resists this there could be some highly public and damaging rows between the two parties as there were before the last election.

The SDP claims that it recruits as many voters for Liberal candidates as the Liberals recruit for SDP candidates, but many Liberals prefer to believe that the Liberals would have done as well in 1983

David Steel

even if there had been no SDP. Such beliefs could only properly be tested if the parties competed against one another. Under the present electoral system that would be electoral suicide. The problem for the Alliance, as its leaders acknowledge, is that if the separate identity of the two parties is retained the electoral system must be changed and proportional representation introduced as speedily as possible. But PR can only be introduced if the two Alliance parties can succeed under the present electoral system in winning a parliamentary majority or at the very least holding the balance in a hung parliament.

A second difficulty in continuing the Alliance is the question of the leadership of the Alliance. Steel and Owen have agreed to dispense with the title of Prime Minister designate. They now say that if the Alliance becomes the largest single grouping in Parliament, the Prime Minister would be the leader of whichever party had won more seats. Since the Liberals seem likely to have many more candidates in winnable seats than the SDP the Liberals look favourite to provide any future Alliance Prime Minister.

Opposition to a merger

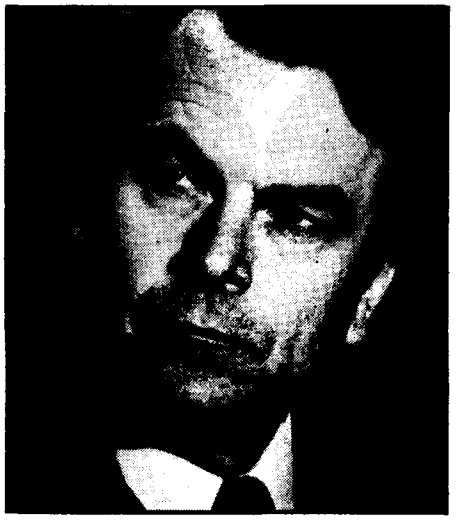
The SDP appears to have little prospect of becoming the dominant partner in the Alliance. It also remains opposed to a merger. Why? If there was a prospect of further large defections of MPs and members from the Labour Party and a further large erosion of Labour Party support then the independence of the SDP from the Liberals might be important for attracting these elements into the Alliance. But the manner of the Kinnock-Hattersley victory within the Labour Party and the new passion for unity means the leaders of the Alliance will not expect any further disintegration of the Labour Party. Labour's electoral support, they calculate, will now strengthen rather than decline further. If it does than the specific utility of the SDP to the Alliance — attracting disillusioned Labour voters and members who might not be ready to move straight to the Liberals — will diminish.

The intransigence of the SDP leadership to the idea of a merger so trumpeted in Salford and so regretted in Harrogate, has much to do with Owen's leadership style and personal ambitions. Roy Jenkins would have put up much less resistance to a speedy merger of the two parties once they had failed to win PR at the first attempt. Owen's refusal to contemplate a merger, however, is buttressed by a further source of strain in the Alliance — disagreement on policy.

Policy differences

These disagreements partly reflect the different distribution of power in the two parties. As a new party which floats free of all established interests and institutions, the SDP leadership has great freedom in making policy and proposing new policy initiatives. Owen can still tell an SDP Conference what they should be thinking. Steel leads a very different party. There are many established interests and groups within the Liberal Party and Steel has constantly to search for the ground that will unite his party and maintain the legitimacy of his leadership. Like a good Gaitskellite, Steel refuses to be bound by conference decisions, but he has less room for manoeuvre than David Owen. On defence, on Ireland, and on aspects of economic policy, conflicts have arisen. Important sections of the Liberal Party are opposed to the deployment of Cruise missiles and to the purchase of Trident. The party as a whole is much more critical of high defence spending and British involvement with nuclear arms than is the SDP. The SDP has no significant unilateralist wing, but unilateralists are a major force within the Liberals as David Owen discovered when he addressed their conference in Harrogate.

Owen's determination to be seen to be as patriotic as Thatcher and as tough on defence questions is the hallmark of his leadership. The Falklands war launched not just one new Churchill on the British public but two. Owen is less pro-American and more pro-European than Thatcher and he opposes details of her policies, such as her refusal to press for dual key, but there has been even on this a noticeable shift of his position since the election. He told the



Dr David Owen

SDP Conference that even if dual key were not conceded this would be no reason for not accepting the deployment of Cruise.

Owen's shift to the right

Even greater strains may yet emerge, however, over economic policy. The Salford Conference has become famous for Owen's great 'shift to the right'. What he said, however, was not much different from the original Limehouse Declaration or from the 1983 manifesto. But he did push the argument a little further, andin doing so has opened some intriguing possibilities for his party. He employed the phrase 'the social market economy' and gave much the most explicit endorsement yet of the need for

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free markets, high profits, and unrestricted competition. The more dynamic and successful the wealth producing sector, the more scope would exist for policies to alleviate poverty and specific inequalities.

Some of these ideas are not so dissimilar from past social democrats and both Owen and Williams like to stress the continuity of their ideas with Crosland's. But they are being uttered in a very different political context,and there are some crucial changes. Owen now explicitly rejects the principle of universal provision in favour of selectivity in tackling the problem of poverty. Selectivity has long been a crucial concept in free market and New Right approaches to welfare; it fits naturally with privatisation of services in order to maximise consumer choice and economic efficiency, and to take welfare out of the political arena.

Owen has not advanced very far down this road. But the logic of his approach appears to demand it. At present there remains a considerable ambiguity in his thinking. On the one hand he seems determined to woo disillusioned Conservative voters while trying to retain the Labour voters already won to the Alliance; on the other he is still saying that the higher social benefits to which the SDP is committed will have to be paid for by higher taxes on wage earners — ending the married man's allowance and not fully indexing the tax thresholds. That seems a recipe for electoral disaster. The Conservatives will be quick to brand the SDP as a party that wants to up taxes, while the SDP's commitment to defend state welfare may appear lukewarm compared to the passionate commitment of both the Labour Party and, indeed, the Liberal Party to defend it.

Thatcherite ground

Much comment on Owen's speech has focused on his evident desire to fight on Thatcher's ground, to accept the priorities for handling the recession which the Thatcher government has established. This means abandoning Keynesian objectives such as full employment and embracing instead policies designed to maintain sound money and promote competition in order to facilitate the restructuring of the British economy and the introduction of new technologies. Owen argues that British economic recovery requires a long period in which British policy-makers accept the central role of the market in determining the distribution of resources and investment.

Yet if Owen seeks a clear and independent identity for the SDP and if he really seeks to confront Thatcher on her own ground, he needs to persuade the Alliance to campaign for lower taxes. Such a programme might well make the SDP extremely attractive to large numbers of present Conservative voters. The Conservatives keep promising to reduce taxes, but so far they have not delivered. Taxation and public spending have both risen. The problem for the Alliance in pledging tax cuts is that taxes can only be substantially reduced if public expenditure is cut. Freeing the resources to make this possible requires either privatisation of services on a major scale or the phasing out of state subsidies to industry and agriculture and to special interest groups like home-owners with mortgages. Owen at Salford dismissed privatisation as supremely irrelevant, bracketing it with nationalisation as a product of the class-based adversary system. Phasing out tax reliefs on the other hand is not politically very attractive. The present Government is caught between its desire to reduce taxes and the intractability of the fiscal crisis. The present budgets for health, education, social security and defence cannot be funded at present levels unless there is either a rapid and sustained recovery or large increases in taxation.

> it is the Conservative vote that will be most at risk in this Parliament

Owen expects the economic recovery in Britain to falter, especially since the outlook for world economic recovery and world inflation is poor. Renewed conflict over the direction of economic policy and over the need to impose further cuts in public spending seems unavoidable. The Conservatives are vulnerable to attacks on their record as the party of lower taxes and more competition. The Labour and Liberal Parties are poorly placed to exploit this because they have long proclaimed themselves in effect as parties of high taxation and high public spending.

Owen must calculate that Conservative popularity will shortly begin to nosedive. Although he still hopes that the Alliance will eventually replace Labour as a radical alternative to the Conservatives, it is the Conservative vote that will be most at risk in this Parliament, and events may push the Conservative government increasingly on the defensive. Disillusioned Conservative voters in 1960-64 and 1972-4 showed greater readiness to move to the Liberals than to Labour. If Owen can position the SDP correctly then he may hope that the Alliance in this Parliament will prove an even more powerful magnet than during their last upsurge in 1981.

The Liberal tradition

But while this would seem to be Owen's course there are obstacles in the way. While much of the SDP seems receptive to Owen's 'tough' ideas on economic policy there are still many unreconstructed Gaitskellites among the leadership who must be led gently down the path to the IEA rehabilitation centre for lapsed Keynesians. There are also the Liberals. Historically the Liberals were the party of less taxes and less government. Their manifestos as recently as 1950 and 1951 called strongly for taxes to be cut. Several of the later intellectuals of the New Right such as Arthur Seldon were Liberals in the 1950s. But since the 1960s the party has identified itself firmly with the social Liberal tradition of Lloyd George. The modern Liberal Party sees itself as the party of Keynes and Beveridge, the party of the mixed economy and the welfare state. At Harrogate for example there was overwhelming support for the NHS and calls to protect and extend public sector services. Liberals support high public spending on welfare more than they want lower taxes, and this commitment is buttressed by the strength of community politics in the party.

Owen's progress towards giving the SDP a clear and separate identity will be constantly checked by the need he has to maintain the Alliance with the Liberals. But the longer the Alliance lasts in the present form the greater will be the danger of the SDP being absorbed by the Liberals. Owen probably realises that if the Alliance fights on the terrain of protecting public services and public sector budgets it risks being eclipsed by a revitalised and rejuvenated Labour Party. The appeal of the SDP to voters is precisely because it has no union ties and no commitment to collectivism. But Owen faces serious difficulties in consolidating that image and making the Alliance the alternative party of government, because the Liberals are far from accepting the need to operate upon Thatcher's terrain. On several issues including cuts in welfare, the autonomy of local government and defence, the movement of both Liberals and Labour is away from Thatcherism. In assuming the policy is now set firm in a Thatcherite mould Owen is predicting the future shape of British politics. But there are other possible futures and both Labour and the Liberals will be busy trying to create them. □

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We may have had equality legislation, but it hasn't made any difference to job segregation.

Cynthia Cockburn

Caught in the Wheels

EVERY SELF-RESPECTING MAN knows that 'women are no good with machinery', they are 'hopeless at technical things'. After all, the facts speak for themselves. Women don't fiddle about inside TV sets, keep an oscilloscope in the garage, or aspire to fly a Tornado jet. Every self-respecting woman however, feels there is something fishy about these facts. We know that women make good, competent and enthusiastic technicians and engineers — most of us have met one or two. Just as many women as men reach maturity with a bent for calculation, problem-solving, design and construction. Why then, do most of us finish up using it to interpret knitting patterns and construct patchwork quilts? Have we chosen or were we pushed? And if we chose — what exactly was the choice we were offered?

I recently bought a book of encyclopedic scope on the history of machinery and technical invention. Working though the index I have given up at P (Ptolemy IV) without finding a woman among the inventors. No doubt we women too have had our technologies, but they are not in our history books. Ours are not the technologies that soared into capitalist profitability in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries.

Anything but an engineer

As a result, the engineering industry today is a sorry tale. 13% of total employment in Britain (1980), it affords only 7% of women's employment. And the 608,000 women in engineering firms fill the lowliest ranks. No less than 93% are employed in the low-skilled categories of clerical, operator and 'other employees', who are often canteen and cleaning workers. 'The female percentage of employment in the different occupational categories is uneven in the extreme' says the Engineering Industry Training Board.[1] 'While no less that 70% of clerical workers are women and 30% of operators, only 2% of scientists/technologists are women. 2% is also the female proportion of technicians and for engineering craft occupations only around one-third of 1% are women.'

A little more should perhaps be said about the 'operators' that account for almost half the women in the industry. These women are after all 'involved with machinery'. But they are confined to routine work, in jobs where little interaction with machinery is required or allowed. Often they work alongside semi-skilled men in a slightly higher paygrade, the 'setter-operators', the ones who make the adjustments to the equipment required by production. Above them again in both pay and skill are test technicians and the engineers who install and maintain the equipment on which the unskilled and semi-skilled work. These are invariably men. Without training in transferable skills, those of craftsperson or technician or technologist, women operators, many of whom have capabilities way beyond the actual requirements of the job, cannot progress to better positions.

When we look at the trends over the recent past, we find little movement. It has always been recognised that the Equal Pay legislation of 1970 was going to fail to produce equal earnings unless sexual segregation at work, the tendency for men and women to fill different and unequal occupational niches, was also ended. This was one reason for the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975, which made it unlawful to prevent us, on grounds of our sex, from entering occupations of our choice. There were two major groups of occupations that were seen as the twin peaks that we needed to scale to achieve equality: managerial (the top jobs) and scientific/technical (the clever jobs). It is now eight years since the Act. Careful observers report some small stirrings of sex-change among lower and middle managers. But in scientific and technical occupations the entry of women is extraordinarily slow.

The Engineering Industry Training Board confirms 'the overall proportion of women in the engineering industry has remained broadly constant over the last ten years. For most skilled occupations also, the female proportion has remained stable.' That is to say, it has remained very low.

Barely visible in the statistics a handful of pioneering women *have* been entering these jobs, however, and this is a factor that I will return to below. For the moment, it is sufficient to note that it is far from being a trend that affects the average woman.

Outlook: slow change

Looking forward to the future, the best indicator we have of the likely presence of women is the present-day statistics of

Women in the engineering industry
Female occupational percentages, April 1980.

Source: Engineering Industry Training Board (statutory returns)

Occupational category	Female employees	Total employees	Females as a percentage of all employees
Managers	4,376	139,207	3.14
Scientists and technologists	1,790	67,767	2.64
Technicians	5,045	217,634	2.32
Administrative and professional staff	21,072	157,249	13.40
Clerks, office machine operators, secretaries and typists	226,576	316,006	71.70
Supervisors	10,008	142,693	7.01
Craftsmen	1,907	515,429	0.37
Operators	293,629	996,976	29.45
Other employees	43,563	269,878	16.14
TOTAL	607,966	2,822,839	21.54

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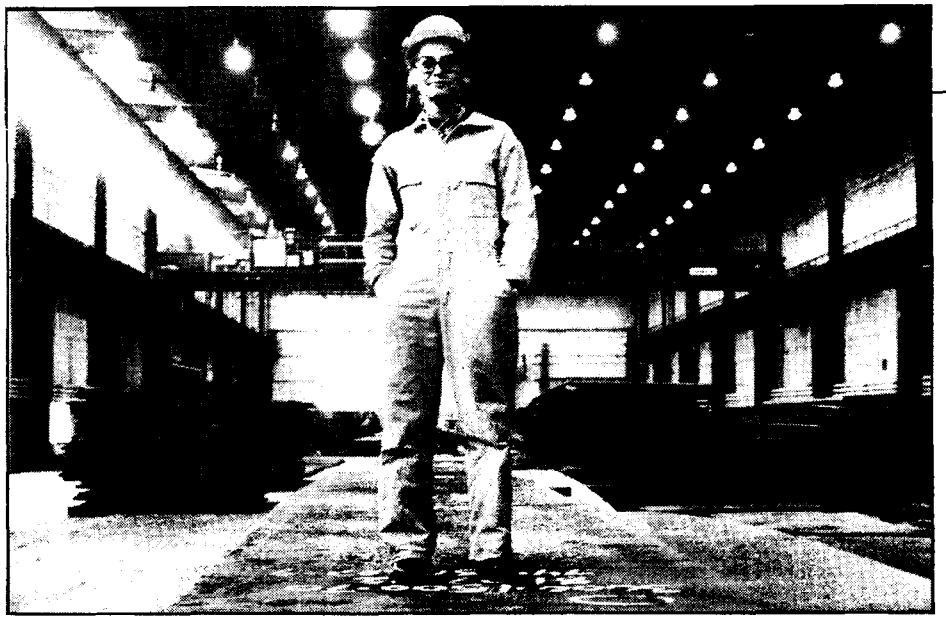

One of the few to succeed.

technical education and training. And here we must begin to distinguish between degree-level students and the humbler technician (TEC qualified) and craftsperson (City &Guilds). In universities, women are creeping up to 6 or 7% of engineering and technology undergraduates. Among technicians on industry training schemes, whereas women are 2.3% of all technicians, they are fractionally more (2.9%) of all trainees. In craft however where they are 0.4% of craftspersons, they are even less (0.3%) of craft trainees (1980). The picture is one of very slow change, slowest at the lower educational levels.

Meanwhile, economic trends do little to help. One noticeable change that *has* occurred in engineering is a dramatic decline in employment due to the recession, a decline in which women have suffered most. Between 1964 and 1981, total employment in engineering dropped by about 25%. The fall among women employees was 34%. This was due to the fact that where new technology is introduced its first effect is to make redundant the repetitive assembly and operator jobs most frequently done by women. Again the difference is marked between the prospects for women without basic education as a springboard to higher level jobs and for those with degree potential. For the former the prospect is deteriorating. On the other hand, scientists, technologists and engineers together increased their share of total employment in the engineering industry between 1975/6 and 1980/1 by almost 30%. If women were to seek these jobs there are, theoretically, employment opportunities in plenty.

The statistics of school education however do not paint a picture of a tidal wave of determined young women surging through the school system and about to swamp the labour markets of British industry. Though at O-level girls have 42% of the maths passes, they have only 21% of physics, 22% of computer studies and a mere 3% of technical drawing. And by the time they reach A-level these shares have fallen to 25%, 19%, 20% and 2% respectively.

'Equal chances'?

People concerned with equal opportunities study these statistics and seek to help women get their 'fair share'. With this in mind, the Equal Opportunities Commission, for instance, has funded several projects aiming to understand women's disadvantages in the technical field and to encourage girls into technology. It has sponsored several career-opportunities courses for young women. It has funded a project in which women are working with teachers and pupils in schools to bring girls into technical subjects.

The EITB sees things in a slightly different light. Women are a wasted national asset. In a situation where there is a critical shortage of skilled engineers of the right kind to assist in the re-kindling of British industry, they feel that no resource should be neglected. They therefore run a number of women projects. One is the 'Insight' programme, which offers short courses to sixth form girl students interested in going on to do an engineering degree course. At the lower educational level it has a 'Premium Grant Scheme' which subsidises companies that will take on girl technicians over and above the firm's actual manpower needs.

Most initiatives to date have been based on the philosophy that women must be 'given more confidence'. We are continuing, the argument goes, to *fail* to make our mark in occupations that are seen to be challenging and rewarding. But are women really such weeds? I would suggest that women know very well both where we are unwelcome and what we are rejecting. We are not failing, we are on strike.

Technology: neither neuter nor neutral

The prevailing belief concerning technology is that it is neutral, mankind's heritage, equally available and relevant to us all. All that women have to do is to reach out and grasp it. The 'man' in mankind, however, is no slip of the tongue. Technology is far from neutral. This should not be a difficult concept to Marxists who are, after all, used to understanding that our technology is capitalist technology and bears the marks and serves the purposes of the class that owns it. It needs only a little further broadening of the mind to understand that our industrial technology also has the imprint and the limitations that come of being both the social property and one of the formative processes of men. Industrial, commercial, military technologies, are masculine in a very historical and material sense. They cannot readily be used in a feminine, nor even a sexless, mode. Women are not merely failing to enter technology. On the one hand we are being repelled, and on the other we are refusing.

Men's greater average physical stature and strength is often cited as a reason for men's preponderance in engineering occupations. Yet it is not self-evident that they should be all male. Many machines, from the lever to the mill, have been developed precisely to *substitute* for human physical strength. The masculinity of technology, men's proprietorial grasp of machinery, has to be seen as a product of social rather than biological history.

We are not failing, we are on strike.

To this we have to relate the male appropriation of the whole concept of 'work'. The paradigm worker, model for both employer and trade unions, is, by men's design, a man. In this context, women's physiology is seen, not as a worker's norm, but as defective. Men scorn the fact, for instance, that some women need a work load that can be modified or varied to take account of their monthly cycle or of pregnancy. Women feel guilty if they display any 'weakness' in this respect. Yet it could have been held to be to working class advantage, as well as to the

[1] References are to Engineering Industry Training Board, *Women in Engineering*, RP/4/79 and *Updated Statistics* July 1981.

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advantage of women, to make our collective demands to the employer on the basis of the weakest, common factor. That this has never been the case can lead to only one conclusion: work, whatever it may mean to the capitalist, is also an important sphere for men in which to establish and maintain power over women as a sex.

All the manly virtues

If the norm for the industrial worker in general is male, that for the qualified engineer, the skilled technician, most certainly is. Engineering represents everything that is defined as manly — the propensity to control and manipulate nature; the celebration of muscle and machine in action upon raw materials; the tolerance of, even pleasure, in dirt, *viz*, grease, swarf and metal shavings. (It is worth remembering that this is not the only kind of dirt however. Men are popularly seen as having a natural aversion to that other kind of dirt, human faeces, blood, vomit, with which women are supposed to feel more ability to cope.) Technical work involves the acceptance of physical risk — exposure to frequent accidents, cuts, contusions. It affords free movement round and about its object, in contrast to the physical confinement of much women's work. It implies control — designing solutions to physical problems, making energy work for you. The all-male workshop fosters and develops masculine patterns of relationships, it is the home of camaraderie based on the exchange of anecdote and slander concerning women.

Add to this that engineering as we know it is firmly embedded in the capitalist business world and the state. The atmosphere is competitive, it is about performance: your firm's machine against the next, your country's weapons against those of its rival. Capitalist industry and contemporary technology both express and embody values that have on the one hand developed out of patriarchy, and on the other have developed to make patriarchy what it is in modern society. The relations surrounding technology continually renew and extend male hegemony over the rest of us. The growth of industrial technology has to be seen as part and parcel of the historical development of gender difference. It has been formative in the growth of class relations. But it has also been part of what has made males into 'men' and females into 'girls'.

Women's values

If engineering occupations have developed as a heartland of male hegemony, it is hardly surprising that female incursions into this domain don't occur easily or painlessly. What women and women's work have come to mean, both to ourselves and to men, is something quite different. It is accepting rather than defying physical and social limitations. While 'men's work' means singlemindedly pitting everything you have, in the army, in the mines, on the high seas, 'women's work' means refusing to let go of your other self. Men's work is predicated upon someone looking after them. We look after ourselves. Women's work means staying at home with sick children if need be. It means carrying human preoccupations into the job: nursing, teaching, social work. It seems as though for women more than for men the social purpose of work is important.

To emphasise this *difference* is not to say that women and men are born this way, immutable. It is to recognise that over hundreds and possibly thousands of years society has constructed gender difference, gender complementarity, and continues to confirm and elaborate it every day, in work as well as outside work. And much in the feminine gender is good. Women (and indeed many men) value it above masculinity. We do not want to have to abandon a concern with feelings and people and purpose in order to take on technology. We don't want to exchange the society of women for the society of men, to become a kind of de-sexed satellite of a male world.

We do not want to have to abandon a concern with feelings and people in order to take on technology.

Of course, men treasure their unique possession of technology. Many skilled trade unions have deliberately kept women out of traditionally male jobs. Individual men resist and resent the intrusion of women into work that is comparable to their own. Managements too, unless it suits them to do otherwise, often recruit personnel into the existing sexually-segregated pattern. Many discourage women from applying for technical jobs and some blatantly discriminate against them.

However, several engineering firms in which I have done interviews claim to be short of skilled engineers and more than willing to employ women. There is no 'discrimination' here, they claim. And I am sure that, broadly speaking, they are telling the truth. But women, they say, are just not coming forward. Now and then one is offered a job and turns it down. The fact is that, while a handful of women are determined enough to persevere, the great majority are turning aside from each gateway as it is reached: metal-work lessons in school, O-level physics, Youth Training Schemes, technical degrees.

The choice we make

Perhaps we need to question the adequacy of the idea of unequal opportunity and discrimination in explaining women's 'failure' and look instead at the environments offered women and how they may actively choose to absent themselves.

First we should make a distinction between two categories of woman, those who do and those who do not try to work in technology. The great majority of women never set themselves on such a course at all. These are the ones who would need to be mobilised if women were indeed to take up 'their half' of the places in skilled technical work. A miraculous wiping out of the sexual division of labour overnight would mean, tomorrow, in the engineering industry alone, another 33,000 women scientists/technologists; around 106,000 female technicians; and a mere quarter of a million craftswomen. These women who are *not* massing into engineering should not, for all this, be seen as being in some way unsuited to work of this kind. Many such women, indeed, may feel some affinity to technology, despite the discouragements and adversities of school and home life. Many women, working in so-called unskilled operator jobs in the industry are actively interested in getting more understanding of their equipment but have little chance of being taken seriously for technician status. Nor, if they had would it be cost-free. Women simply cannot fulfil this side of their nature on the terms presently available.

The personal cost of entering technology

Secondly, there is the handful of pioneers who do step forward and have a go. They are the ones who in the last decade have, by the sum of their individual and isolated efforts, shifted the sexual division of labour a fraction of a percentage point in favour of women. What differentiates the woman pioneer? Perhaps we can detect in her experience what deters the majority.

A survey was recently made of the young women on the EITB 'Insight' course in 1981.[2] It showed these young women, potential graduate engineers, to be a rather distinct group — not the average A-level student. More than half had a father in engineering, science or education; 87.5%

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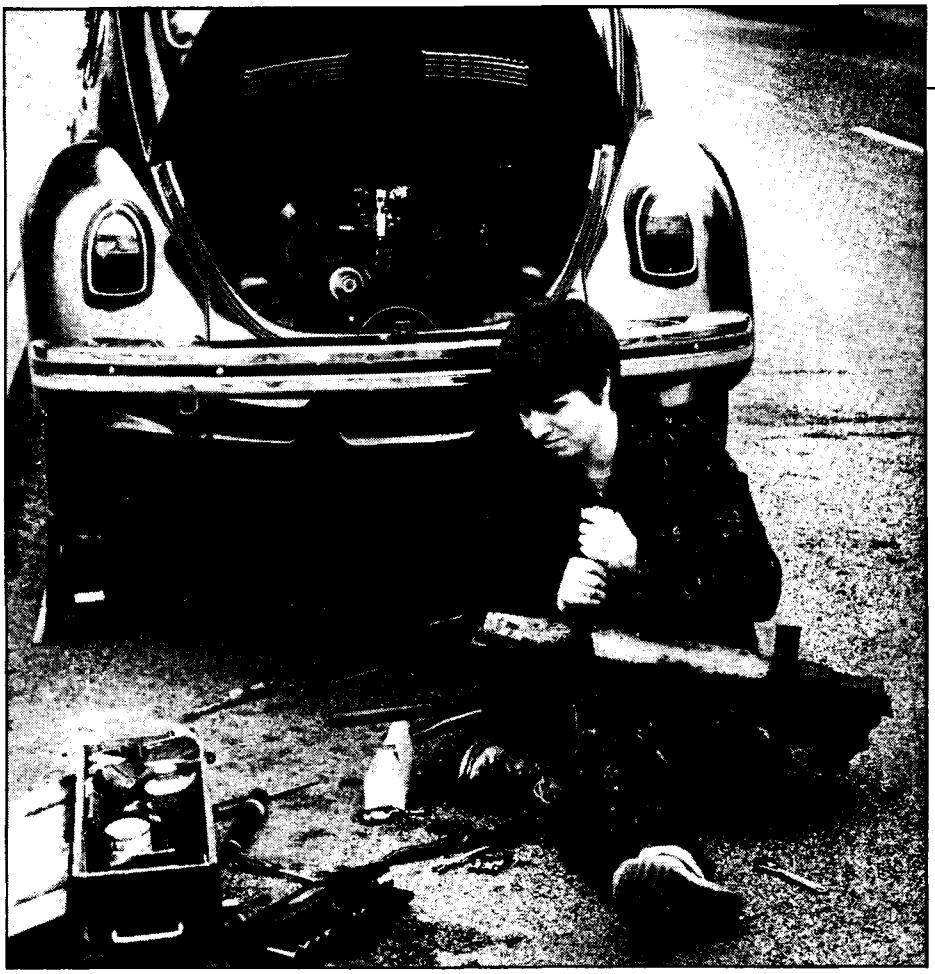

Getting dirty and sweaty, lying on the floor . . .

came from middle class backgrounds. They were exceptionally well-qualified, with considerably more A-grade O-levels than those intending other degree courses. Their problems are typified by a women chemical engineer I have spoken with. Though she loves her work and wants to move eventually into the even less welcoming environment of production engineering, finds that she has continually to behave out of character, using a combative male style, if she is to have any effectiveness in work or union. She is hurt by being ostracised by the other women in the firm, secretaries who resent her direct relationship with the male engineers. She also says, sadly, that if she wants to marry it will have to be Leonardo da Vinci, since less brilliant men shy away from being associated with a moderately competent woman engineer.

A further study has been made of the EITB Girl Scholarship Scheme, begun in 1976.[3] The study showed the technicians to be exceptionally determined young women. In talking about the characteristics necessary to succeed, they emphasised self-reliance and independence, a need to be 'extremely dedicated'. They had to survive discouraging remarks and negative comments — especially from friends their own age, and particularly from men friends. They had to be prepared to lose the society of other women. This applies both at work, where they were a small minority in their occupation, but also at home. Female technicians found that their female friends often resented the fact that they had so much in common with male acquaintances and were able to converse with them so easily. Many female technicians reported having 'lost touch' with their female school friends, and that their closest friends were now the few other women in a similar position to themselves.

Perhaps, as things are, the cost for most women is just too high. Perhaps it means sacrificing something we value. So long as the dominant technological culture and the uses of technology remain unchanged, when we ask women to 'succeed' in technology we may well be asking ourselves to betray values that are important to us.

Moving forward

Women are caught up in a contradiction over engineering, indeed over all technology. I have heard women arguing: should we keep our hands clean, keep well away from men's technology and run the risk of typecasting ourselves as whimsical earth mothers? Or do we need fire to fight fire, at the risk of burning our hands?

We cannot move forward into the male industrial field without great individual cost, and cost to the women's movement by a continual drain of strong and able women into mere competition with men and collaboration with capital. Yet we cannot leave things as they are. Why? Because, like it or not, we now live in a world in which power lies in the economic ownership of these technical forces of production (and of distribution, reproduction and war) and in the practical control of these things. We cannot continue to be the passive objects of some technologies (at the receiving end of medical and military technologies, for instance, that we should be questioning or resisting), and the manipulated and exploited operators of others (typewriters, washing machines). We have to learn technical skills. If we are to learn, we have to get in there. It cannot be done at a distance.

Besides, the cultural barrier that is erected between women and technology is all too closely related to other physical taboos that confine and limit us. When you see a woman take a set of spanners and approach a car, you suddenly become aware of the manifold informal pressures against women in public places using their bodies in the way men do: getting dirty and sweaty, climbing up things, lying on the floor, spreading their legs, exerting muscular force. Learning to understand and use tools that work metal and wood, to translate geometry into motion and energy into work, these are things that we cannot do without if we are to stop being the world's victims. We have to get our bodies out of their cocoons, and this involves overcoming a certain physical cowardice and reticence that is the bad side of our gendered character.

On our terms

Is there a feminist and socialist strategy for getting us into the technical world without getting us hurt or doing harm to others? It seems to me we need a firm grasp, first and foremost, of a theory that recognises *systemic* male dominance and the part of technology within it. Only this can help us make informed choices. And when it comes to those choices, at a practical level?

The first thing, surely, is that we should not deny our social values. We should work our way into technology along paths that make sense for us. If, as seems likely, we can do nothing but hurt ourselves and others by breaking into aerospace and ballistics, well, let us leave those fads to the lads, and opt consciously instead for work

[2] The Report of the EOC/SSRC Conference, *Women in Engineering*, 1982.

[3] Ibid.

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in industrial sectors that seem to us to be more humanly useful and malleable: engineering for construction perhaps, or for the media, domestic equipment. Women seem to be taking this course naturally. Look for instance at the disproportionate number of women physicists who choose to work in medical physics in the health service. Media resources officers in education, who deal with video and printing, are often women.

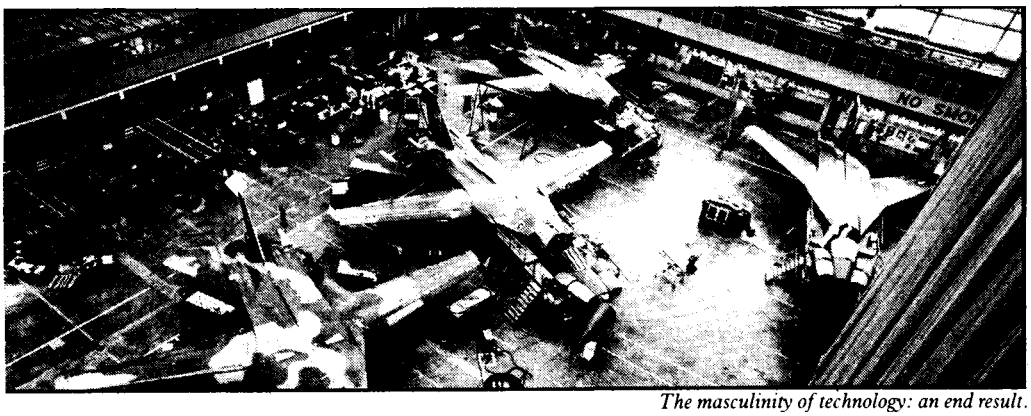
A second route is to recognise the alien nature of most business enterprise and opt for self-organised collectives. There are already many small cooperatives, mixed or women only, in printing and building, for instance. They afford a way of separating out the already difficult relations of technology from those of capitalist employment.

Organising independence

In my view, by far the most effective principle evolved to date is separate, woman-only organisation. It enables us to learn (teach each other) without being put down. Provide school girls with separate facilities and the boys won't be able to grab the computer and bully the girls off the console. Provide young women with all-women courses so that they can gain the experience to make an informed choice about an engineering career. The organisation *Women in Manual Trades* is an autonomous women's movement initiative that is in this spirit. Some progressive local authorities are sponsoring women-only workshops and courses. The Sheffield 'Tran-sister Workshop' in electronics, with women instructors, is an example. We need to demand a massive increase in resources from the state, from industry, from industrial training boards, for women-run, women-only initiatives. Everywhere we have tried it, from women's caucuses to Greenham Common, autonomy works wonders for our feelings and our strength. We need, before all else, a great expansion of the autonomous women's sphere in technology.

Nonetheless, we have already learned that while autonomy is necessary, it is also not the whole answer. It only works in some situations and therefore it only gets us so far. What occurs in engineering is very similar to what has long been noted by women trying to make an impact within male-dominated trade unions. It is what some Italian feminists have called the contradiction between 'mutilation and marginalisation'. It is perhaps our essential contradiction as feminists. We begin by standing on the edge of the action, we are marginal. Then we seek equality and make our choice between failure or being a psuedo-man: mutilation. Then we assert our difference and organise autonomous women's groups, committees, demonstrations. This feels great. But over time it is clear just how the male machinery, of trade unions, of left politics, of factory and workshop, the world in short, grinds on regardless. Still we are marginal.

There is a limit to what we can earn and what technologies we can handle in women's collectives. There are limits to the impact we can have and what we can learn. It is a choice more available to middle class than to working class women. So we also need devices to take us into the sphere of male and capitalist work. We can invent mechanisms that help us to avoid isolation. Progressive teachers and employers, must be pressed to ensure that space is made not just for the token woman, but for groups of women at one time. For women supervisors and managers too. We can ourselves form women's groups alongside work or study to help each other talk through and deal with our minority situation. The YWCA in London has a remarkable scheme to help isolated young woman technicians. Often only sixteen or seventeen years old, they can come together for a week at a time and simply share their experience, talk through their isolation and give each other support.



The masculinity of technology: an end result.

Woman-led, can it work?

There is one further step. Just what do we mean by equal representation of men and women in an occupation? It will never be exactly 50% of each sex. The norm today is a preponderance of men, a handful of women. We should start to visualise women-led situations. How impossible it seems to imagine a technical training course, a workshop, an engineering plant where women are, simply in a majority and in positions that can influence the relations of work and the mode of control. Where do we ever see men under women's tutelage, lads learning from women, men obliged to do things women's way? That is more revolutionary than autonomy itself.

> **We should work our way into technology along paths that make sense for us.**

If we made this one of our goals, there would be some interesting consequences. The sex/gender struggle in the workplace would change subtly, the balance tipped a little in favour of women. Men's reluctance to participate on such terms would be glaringly exposed. We would see them for what they are: the original separatists.

Of course there are many problems. Such a strategy is impossible until enough women exist, trained and experienced, ready and willing, to enter such situations. Besides, male dominance is not based merely on numbers. It is systemic, every one man is backed up by men's organisation, wealth and ideology in society as a whole. As Beatrix Campbell wrote scorchingly not long ago — 'we are yet to win power in a single institution containing both sexes, from *City Limits* to the City of London.'[4] Nonetheless, playing the numbers game can be a start. Where positive discrimination in favour of women is both legal and attainable, we should remember perhaps that between the strategy of the sacrificial token woman and the strategy of women-only, there exists another option: putting men into a minority and releasing women's creativeness in a context within which men may learn and things may change. □

[4] Beatrix Campbell in 'A man's a man for all that', *City Limits*, September 16-22, 1983.

Thanks for advice received from Liz Allen, Mary Clemmey, Heather Hunt, Anne Phillips and Elaine Sinclair.

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Interview with George Melly

by Simon Frith

If you had been born 30 years later, how different would your life have been?

I wouldn't have been a jazz singer — I don't think I'd have been exposed to it. I might have still written but I'd have been a lot more pessimistic. We've reached the end of the time when the world was going to be changed through love, hallucinatory drugs etc. We felt that the individual then could change things by sitting down in Trafalgar Square or marching to Aldermaston. And I think kids just don't feel that anymore, they feel very cynical about the possibility of anyone affecting anything.

They still go marching?

They still go marching, yes, but I do feel that there just isn't the feeling that things are going to change for the better.

Was Revolt into Style *your obituary of the 60s?*

I felt it was in a way. It seemed to be finishing, but in fact it chugged on for a bit. But then if you compare, say, punk, which again became a style very quickly, it didn't break my thesis. It wasn't a 'things are getting better' movement, was it? Very nihilist and angry, but angry without aim.

So you still have good memories of the 1960s?

No, I didn't feel at home in them. In a way I feel more comfortable now for the simple reason that in the 60s anyone over the age of about 26 (or 36 certainly, which I was) was considered senile and rather disgraceful. This is now not the case. I have relationships now with young people which are very easy. There aren't all those barriers, like the refusal to use words, that people had in the 60s. You see I rather like talking.

There are good things that are happening now: there is less of that exclusion of general culture, of the idea that an old master has to be boring or that a nineteenth century novelist has to be rubbish. There's a wider sense of what's acceptable.

Did jazz play a similar role for you in your youth as rock and roll for teenagers since?

Absolutely. Jazz was immensely romantic for us. The difference between jazz and pop is that pop was a thing connected with the present whereas jazz was a nostalgic look back to a sort of idealised paradise.

How widespread was jazz interest in the 1940s in class terms. You were turned on to jazz in public school?

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Some of it came out of public school, some out of housing estates. The mass of it was suburban, probably university students from suburban houses.

Many of those suburban jazz lovers (people like Phillip Larkin, Kingsley Amis and John Wain) seem to have become very violently opposed to what happened to jazz? How much do you listen to contemporary jazz?

Practically not at all. I don't like it. I mean I see what it is, and I respect it, but I don't listen to it with pleasure. In jazz a new thing arrives which opposes the old and the two schools will hate each other for a bit until they discover they don't hate each other at all. I mean like be-bop was violently against swing in the old sense, although the musicians came up through the swing bands. Now if you listen to Charlie Parker it's not incomprehensible even to someone who likes King Oliver. Gradually I start to listen to the old masters of avant garde with a little more pleasure. I just take a rain check on it as my ears are not very agile to adjusting themselves to two sides of an LP on which the saxophonist plays one note at varying intervals. But nevertheless I know very well that in 20 years I'll think what charming music it is and how it's obviously an extension of what was directly before it.

How different do you find the audiences that you sing to now from the ones that you sang to in the 1950s?

Not all that different. Of course there's a lot of one's contemporaries coming out in search of their wild youth. But there are also a lot of young people coming and listening to us, especially in universities and technical colleges which we wouldn't have set foot in around 1965. Now we play a wide variety of jobs: everything from Oxford May Balls, to technical colleges, jazz clubs, theatres, but mostly concerts. And the audiences are mixed age groups — up to 60 but down to 17.

Do you think of yourself as respectable in a way that you weren't then?

Only because everybody else is so much less respectable and, anyway, if anyone goes on doing anything for long enough in Britain, one becomes respectable. I mean even, say, Willie Hamilton, who's always attacking the Queen, has become a sort of respectable institution. Today, I'm unlikely to be banned from a Sunday concert by the magistrates in Derby, which I was in the 50s, solely because of what titles I was going to sing.

But isn't there a political thrust towards changing things back again — take Margaret Thatcher's speech about the 60s being the origins of all that is wrong with Britain today?

I think there's something in what she says in a way because the 60s gave people these enormous expectations of instant money, instant fame, instant everything else. I hesitate to agree with *anything* Mrs Thatcher says but one has to say that part of the disappointment around us is that people thought the party would go on forever.

She also ties that in with the notion that permissiveness undermined morals, the family, discipline in schools, and so on?

Well, in a way it did. I mean that was a good thing. There is a new conservatism sexually; that cross old gentleman in the sky has invented AIDS hasn't he? But nevertheless one can see films like Bunuel's *L'Age D'or* on television which one couldn't have done in the 60s. So what was appalling in 1932 is seen as a rather quaint exercise in nihilism in 1983.

Your involvement in jazz has always been accompanied by an involvement with surrealism and I have always thought of you as a British bohemian. Do you think bohemianism has ever been significant in Britain?

As an old surrealist, I have always mistrusted bohemianism as such. Bohemianism is simply the licence for eccentricism. You know, someone with a big hat, with illegitimate children . . . People like Bunuel are not at all bohemian, they are surrealist; very correct in their clothes and behaviour and deportment except when they wish to create scandal. They were not the wide-hatted, bearded, drunken, wenching prototype image of a bohemian.

I have a slightly different image of bohemia which involves the combination of certain aspects of proletarian culture with a certain sort of artistic community.

Yes you get that. I mean in a sense bohemianism is about that. But in fact bohemianism is basically a middle class thing.

The great source of pop bohemians is the art school.

Yes, that's true. You see the advantaged proletariat enter the bourgeoisie and become perhaps art students and bohemians or perhaps accountants and cabinet ministers. But the disadvantaged (I hate all those words) tend to turn very sour at times like this.

Luckily there hasn't yet been a charismatic leader to fuse the thuggish lumpen proletariat into a movement which can actually affect life, except peripherally. This is, of course, the equivalent of saying one likes moderation, I dare say. When it comes to not having one's face kicked in by people in uniform I always agree that I prefer moderation. I have always said to myself that I love revolutionaries and hate revolutions because for a revolution to succeed it always has to swallow the vices of what it superceded.

Were art schools as centres of disaffection significant for jazz?

Disaffection hasn't got that much to do with jazz. It has to do with not looking like mummy wanted and not living like mummy wanted and screwing more than mummy wanted and certainly drinking much more than mummy wanted, but it didn't have much to do with disaffection. I mean within it one could say there were people who were Labour supporters, a few communists, a few fascists even. But the mass of people were vaguely Labour inclined, certainly pro-black which was a very important element because the people we admired the most were black. It wasn't to do with organised disaffection, it was more to do with thumbing one's nose at the bourgeois motives.

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Was it also a way of thumbing one's nose at bourgeois culture?

Not really, because most of us read a great deal, or liked looking at pictures or were interested in many things outside jazz. It wasn't much to do with rejection, it was to do with having an additional and central passion.

Was the basic drug of the jazz world alcohol?

Yes, of the traditional revivalists, just as much as marijuana was probably the drug of the modernists. There was the odd junky, yes, but entirely in the modern jazz world. In revivalism there was a rather cheerful scene — you know hangovers, spewing up and all that . . . pretty traditional. The jazz world floated on a sea of beer.

Moving on to your interest in surrealism, how much do you think it has become part of bourgeois art?

I think superficial aspects of surrealism penetrate everything, including advertisements for Benson and Hedges. The meaning of surrealism, its philosophical position, the attempt to fuse the subconscious and conscious, to make them one strata of thought, the search for complete freedom, is alas not very important to most people. And goodness knows one doesn't live the surrealist life oneself.

Surrealism is an historical movement which is very important and I think it said a lot of things that needed saying. Of course it got itself into an almost impossible position because it tried to be effective politically and was rejected by all politicians as a hopeless sort of anarchic dream. You have read the history of surrealism and the Communist Party. It was a tragi-comedy first class. But I think surrealism survived and I breathe the surrealist air with gratefulness. But I am someone who sticks to the reassuring moments of revolt in my youth.

I have always thought surrealism was a difficult sort of movement to have any base in Britain where we are so opposed to thinking about the unconscious.

I think the difficulty is that the English always want to be gents in the end. You can be a French intellectual but not a gent. The English also don't like joining things (and the movement was mostly in England, there was very little Welsh or Scottish surrealism). The lack of cafe life in Britain also goes against movements, because you either meet people individually or in small groups. There is nowhere where one can go and like-minded people are sitting around and things are thrashed out, enemies made and friends accumulated.

Do you think art can be of political significance?

Not really, I think it's a substitute, it gives one the illusion of freedom, but in the end I don't think art affects life very much — I think it reflects it. In the last 50 years art has largely presented nightmares whether it be Francis Bacon or Kafka and one might at the beginning have thought that these were exaggerated. Then one finds that life does copy art in an awful way, or let us say the artist foresees things. For example, Dali is the precursor of the concentration camps — not that he would have wanted concentration camps — but his horrors were turned into solid reality. And one sees around the world at the present moment Bacon's vision only too clearly amplified in various police cells and concentration camps and I think that the artist is sensitive to history. So sensitive that he sees what's coming unconsciously. There is an area of prophecy in art.

It is weird, though, to feel that one can go to into an apartment and see a Francis Bacon on the wall and know that the people are not concerned with the police cell which they may be supporting.

The other side of the politics of art is the use made of it by the state.

It's used chauvinistically for a start and the fact that chauvinistically one shows a Bacon does not invalidate what Francis Bacon is trying to do. It says something interesting about the state: it turns art into a sort of commodity of national pride. Henry Moore was violently attacked in the 30s by the British establishment inside and outside Parliament. Russian art from Stalin on, was turned into something very comprehensible to people, and very boring. Art became a pure means of presenting an ideal of what happens on the farm or in the factory. So the state can either support art which seems to be against its premises or suppress it, but above all it doesn't live it. Just as it feels it has to be fully armed so it feels it has to have art. Art is cake icing for the state.

But the state also has material effects in the way it supports particular artists or musicians, enabling them to make a living.

I'm all in favour of the state doling out vast amounts to the arts, because I enjoy the arts. But I don't know how badly it affects the artists: I mean Bacon has never been supported, Freud hasn't, the best rock music hasn't. It's usually the pretentious and unpopular or else the prestigious that manages to win support from the state.

My basic belief is that the best popular music works because of its market impact.

That of course is a very convenient argument for people to say I'm making a million pounds and that shows it works. Malcolm McLaren played that argument every way. He liked ripping off vast amounts from record companies. In some cases the pop impresarios of the 60s did rip off bands but they pretended to be on the side of the artist whereas McLaren seems to be against them openly, he displays his vices as virtues.

One of the reasons why musicians might seek Arts Council support is to free themselves from the demands of their commercial audience. Have you ever felt restricted by your public?

That is more true for the avant-garde edge of jazz which is almost indistinguishable from certain forms of modern serious music and which will always have a very small audience and needs subsidising, for example, people like Mike Westbrook. Goodness they are solemn. You know they talk solemnly about the meaning of the thing. Why do they call it jazz? Jazz is for me a music of joy, sadness, lust, drunkenness, perhaps misery. But what it isn't is somebody talking in third programme language about the meaning of what they're up to.

So as a commercial performer now you're happy that you can perform the way you want to?

Yes, I am. Now I work with John Chilton I have extended what I do — I would never have done a Cole Porter song in the 1950s. Now there are certain ballads I enjoy singing, although the centre is still the sort of jazz I sang 40 years ago. 40 bloody years ago.□

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In November, the Communist Party has its biennial congress. It promises to be, to put it mildly, a stormy affair.

A roundtable discussion

The Long and Winding Road

Britain's Communists in 1983

The participants in the round table are: Dave Cook, member of the Communist Party's National Executive Committee and Communist parliamentary candidate for Vauxhall, London; John Hoffman, member of the Communist Party East Midlands District Committee and *Marxism Today* Editorial Board; Lou Lewis, member of the Communist Party National Executive Committee and a regional organiser for UCATT; Jane Woddis, active feminist and chairwoman of the Communist Party Birmingham City Committee.

We've seen a very severe setback for the labour movement since 1979. What is the nature of this crisis, how profound is it, and what do you think the Communist Party has to offer the labour movement in the way of overcoming it.

Jane It is not just a crisis of the labour movement. It is important to emphasise this, particularly as the CP has a conception of other social forces besides the labour movement, for the same crisis is affecting what we would broadly call the other democratic movements, the other social forces. The only exception is CND, although even that was squeezed during the election.

John It's important that we don't overstate the problems, although you are absolutely right that we have suffered a setback in the labour movement. We must always remember that the real crisis in our society isn't a crisis of the labour movement, or of the working class, or of Marxism, it is fundamentally a crisis of capitalism. It is crucial to see mass unemployment, a move to authoritarianism of a dangerously populist kind, a climate of fear and intimidation as the backcloth to understanding why the labour movement has suffered this defeat and how we can move out of it. Now, with regard to the contribution of the CP, it seems to me that we have a good deal to offer in this situation. We have a classical Marxist heritage which stresses that the working class movement must be a movement of the majority. We've put an enormous amount of thought over the years into the strategy and tactics of the *British Road to Socialism*[1] [BRS — *ed*] which raises very sharply the problem of how you formulate immediate programmes which are both radical and also realistic.

Lou I agree with John that the main crisis is the capitalist crisis, and the crisis of the labour movement is how to deal with the crisis itself and its effects, which include major structural changes in the working class. One of the problems for the labour movement is policy, not so much the nature of policy but the understanding of the policy among trade union members and the mass of working people. This failure to win the policies is because the labour movement has been unable to project a perspective in both the short and longer term. We have to reflect back to the militancy of the 60s and 70s where there were considerable gains in the short term, but the militancy lacked a political perspective. We had the defeat of Heath, the return of a Labour government, but no perspective of what we wanted from that Labour government. So we had the chapter of disasters which led to 1979 and the return of the Tories. The unique position of the Communist Party here is the fact that we have a perspective as set out in the BRS. The problem is, however, that while the labour movement hasn't won a perspective around its own policies amonst the mass of people, we as a party have not been able to win wide understanding and support for the sort of perspective outlined in the BRS in the labour movement.

Dave It is the depth of the capitalist crisis which throws into sharp relief the failure of the labour movement. At a time of mass unemployment and all the other problems of the crisis, you might have expected the Left to be in a much stronger position. The fact that it is not is evidence of its failure to capitalise on the disaffection which exists on a wide scale. The Left has failed to face up to the extent of the labour movement's long term decline, which is undeniable if you look at the share of the Labour vote and the impact of socialist ideas amongst large sections of the working class. There has been a tendency to attribute the recent problems of the Labour Party, and indeed the CP, to short term factors. The responsibility of the CP in this situation is to refuse to acquiesce in these glib explanations and to help the movement face up to those deep long term reasons for its difficult situation, to try and suggest ideas and initiatives, based on its own activity, its Marxist tradition and strategy, to point the way forward.

Jane I agree with Dave that it isn't enough to say it is all due to the crisis of capitalism. We have to put a lot of responsibility at the door of the labour and democratic movements themselves including the party. It is not just the failure to give a long term perspective, we have also failed to link that perspective with very immediate things. The Tory Party has been very good at this. It is talking to people about the immediate things that affect them, and to some extent the Left has been projecting distant things.

Since the election there has been a big debate rumbling around the labour movement about, firstly, the scale of the crisis that the labour

[1] The BRS is the programme of the Communist Party. It was first adopted in 1951 and revised on several occasions subsequently. In 1977 it was revised substantially and a fierce debate ensued over the new concepts contained in it including an alliance between the labour movement and other social forces and a view of revolutionary change as a process rather than a moment. Copies can be obtained from P and P, 16 St John Street, London EC1, price 60p (incl. postage).

The roundtable was chaired by Martin Jacques.

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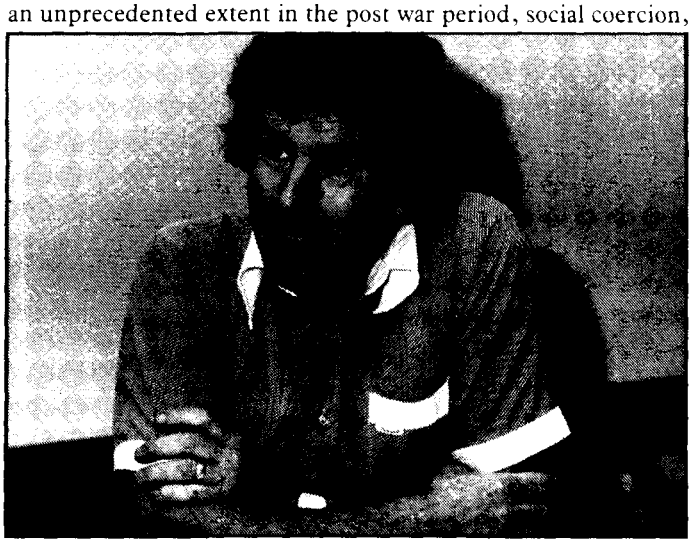
movement faces and, secondly, what you do about it. How do you see this?

Dave Those who underestimate the scale of the crisis in the labour movement sometimes end up complacently saying that the approach of the Left and the labour movement is OK, we've just got to hang on in there and wait for something to turn up. I think that, in effect, was Benn's position in the *Guardian* when he wrote that the 8½ million Labour votes were votes for socialism, and represented a very important bridgehead. I believe the consequence of the present crisis of the labour movement is that it has got to make significant changes. I don't mean changes in policy, but primarily changes in the way it functions. Large sections of the Left in the Labour Party and, to a lesser extent, the CP, have tended to conduct their arguments within a narrow tube of the internal organisations of the labour movement. They've not reached the mass of people. This is very apparent in Lambeth, where I live, where the Labour Left conduct their politics within the town hall and the ward Labour Parties whereas the Right conduct their politics amongst the people.

One of the main contributions the CP can make in the next period is to identify what the main objective must be. In my opinion it is to build an anti-Tory majority. That can't be reduced to the question of winning support for Labour — it has got to involve a wider concept, and I am *not* talking here about an electoral agreement with the SDP, the Liberals or the Nationalists. But it is more than just a question of building support for Labour. It was recently reported from a conference of the Scottish Socialist Society that someone opposing a broad campaign for devolution had stated 'the Labour Party is the campaign for a Scottish Assembly'. What disastrous sectarianism.

John Winning support for an effective short term programme is I think crucial and I agree with Dave to an extent that there is a danger of the Labour Left seeing socialism simply as an abstract principle and not really getting to grips with the fact that people can be won for socialism not by an expression of propaganda or principles but through the implementation of short term programmes which then in themselves demonstrate the need for wider structural change. Where I think we have to be careful is not to take a too static view of either the electorate or the labour movement. The ideological battle is a crucial ingredient in the Tory offensive. But it isn't just about ideas, it's about using, to an unprecedented extent in the post war period, social coercion, involving, for example, the use of unemployment. So I feel that the situation shouldn't be looked at too pessimistically.



Lou Lewis

We are talking about the problems of the wider labour movement but the Communist Party itself has been in difficulties. In fact ever since 1963, with a brief interruption in the early 70s, Communist Party membership has gradually declined, with the rate of decline accelerating over the last few years. The decline of the Communist Party has, in fact, more or less paralleled that of the Labour Party. How do you account for this decline?

John The causes are complex, and we should distinguish between objective factors over which we have virtually no control and subjective ones. In the postwar period of relative prosperity we've had the social democratic consensus, cold war pressures which tended to mean that our party's links with the socialist world took on a sinister and menacing appearance. And Lou mentioned earlier the changing structure of the working class which I think has affected us as well, with new white collar sections without the political traditions and class consciousness of older sections. The more contentious part of any analysis is the subjective problems, problems of leadership. Harry Pollitt noted as early as 1950 that the CP had a tendency to put itself into a position of what he called self-imposed isolation as a response to dominant reformist trends. There has been a tendency to stress the CP as an independent party — sometimes this has taken the form that we should be a mass party rather than a cadre party — and that has not only contributed to a falling membership but also a less effective use of existing members. And these various problems have resulted in a quite severe identity problem: what is our relationship to the Labour Party, do we or do we not want affiliation, are we a Leninist party which can demand greater commitment from our members, how much of the socialist world's experience is relevant to the BRS, how can one combine work in industry with work in the broad movement?

On all these crucial issues the party leadership has tended to respond with ambiguity and indecisiveness, and this has contributed to a degree of demoralisation, frustration and, worst of all, the tendency for inner party differences to take a really sectarian, virulent form. So, although our party leadership have introduced many new ideas, responded to new social forces and sought to turn outward in public work, all of which is positive, this has often been accompanied by a tendency to pose new ideas against old and has led to a sense of disunity, frustration and demoralisation.

Jane I am surprised you suggest that the stress on the independent role of the party has been part of the problem because in some ways I feel it is the failure to do that which has been a significant problem. It is difficult to think of specific campaigns that the party has played a leading role in initiating and claimed the credit for in a public way. The last completely independent one we did was the prices petition in 1978 which came from nowhere and went nowhere. We played a good independent role during the Falklands war, but the problem is there aren't many examples like this.

Lou If there was a ready-made answer, we would have found it by now. I believe there are definitely long term objective problems that have affected the Party. Take my own experience as a labour movement activist. I have worked in the construction industry for most of my working life and things have got better year by year until the recent period. For me the debate has been about 'could

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we have got more?' It is only in the last three of four years that we have seen a decline in living standards. New questions are now coming before people, as a result of this decline, and it affects different sections in different ways. We are now moving into a new situation and if the CP can apply itself to the new conditions, I feel optimistic that the CP can begin to identify its political role.

One of our major problems is the way the party staffs other movements, particularly the labour movement. This draws massively on our resources and weakens our ability to staff our own organisation. I think this commitment is correct but it has detracted from our independent role and the work of our branches. The virtue of our electoral work is that it gives us the opportunity to project the party which is not so easy to do in the labour movement and other movements. We sink our identity for unity, for clarity around the policies of those organisations. I think the CP has still got to find the answer to this. This is a key problem and the extent to which we solve it is the extent to which we can reverse the party's decline.

Dave I'd like to look at the problems facing the CP in the context of the problems facing the Left because all sections of the Left have, to a greater or lesser extent, had to adapt to a new situation. The Labour Left made a total change in their approach from the late 70s and won some important victories within the Labour Party and the trade union movement as a consequence. The CP attempted to adapt to the changed situation with its adoption of the new edition of the BRS in 1977. Now one of the major problems facing the CP is that it hasn't sufficiently built the implications of the adoption of the new BRS into its practice. There are two reasons for this. First of all, a large minority within the CP are fundamentally opposed to major propositions in the BRS and the CP's international position and have consistently waged a fight against those positions ever since. Secondly, there have been failures by the leadership of the Communist Party, of which I have been a member for a long time and therefore share part of the responsibility, to battle through the implications of the changes made in the 1977 edition of the BRS. The fact is that the ground has shifted, since I joined the CP in 1960, on a number of the propositions on which being a Communist was based. There have been new developments in Marxist theory which have created big problems in the relationship between theory and practice. The CP is no longer prepared to accept a monolithic conception of democratic centralism, that's why we had a major debate and adopted a new approach on inner party democracy four years ago. There are new forces in the labour movement and other democratic movements posing quite new problems. What happened in the socialist countries is no longer an acceptable model of socialism for us in Britain. So a new basis for revolutionary optimism has got to be created. And this can only be done by following through in a much more powerful way the distinctive implications of the BRS.

One of the problems which the CP has faced over the last four or five years is a much more powerful Labour Left. The Labour Left has undoubtedly acted as a powerful magnet on the Left. What difference do you think this rise of the Labour Left has made to the position of the CP?

Jane One of the reasons people get involved in politics is because they want to influence things. And the smaller you get, the less influence you have. The Labour Party offers for some people at least the chance, perhaps, of more influence. That is an argument that people often put forward for joining the Labour Party. The

Jane Woddis

rise of the Labour Left has certainly been an attraction for people, perhaps not so much over the past year or so, but certainly a few years before that. People felt that things were really moving and there was some possibility for change. Obviously there are some exciting things going on in the Labour Party, but personally, I don't find the Labour Party appealing. It seems to me so limited in what it can do. People are so hamstrung by all that resolution passing, going from one committee to another. We had a long discussion between the Birmingham CP women's group and the Labour Party women's group. They were describing various resolutions and amendments trying to get changes in policy. At the end of it all I asked 'and what have you actually done', and there was this stunned silence. They said 'well, we haven't done anything properly at all'. They hadn't actually been out on the streets doing anything. We were able to give all these examples of campaigns that we'd taken part in and leaflets we'd distributed over the last two years. They'd been concentrating on trying to change things within the Labour Party. I don't think it was just because that was what the Labour Party was going through at that time, I'm sure it is part and parcel of the limitations of the Labour Party.

John I still think that our relations with the Labour Party and the labour movement needs careful thought because when Lou was talking of the independent role of the party there is a real sense in which this notion, if we're not careful, actually operates against our concept of a broad democratic alliance. The example Jane gave of the prices petition is a classic case of the party doing something all on its own almost in a self-imposed ghetto. Now the strength of the concept of the broad democratic alliance is that the party can go forward by its capacity to give leadership and stimulus to hundreds of thousands of people and this seems to me, in essence, the historic role of the party. What worries me is our electoral policy, for example, where we do seem to cut ourselves off from the rest of the labour movement precisely at a time when there is a heightened political consciousness.

There are serious political divisions within the CP. How do you see the nature of these differences, what are they about and what is their effect?

Lou There is a great diversity. There are some people, as Dave said earlier, who don't accept the BRS. There are others who want

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John Hoffman

Dave Cook

to take it further than our congress was prepared to go in 1977, and dilute the position of the organised working class. The trouble with all this diversity is that many of the things that are being debated are not being tested in practice. There's no test of the policies and there is no test of comrade's positions. I believe that if many of the positions were tested then it would resolve much of that debate. There is one view, however which argues there is a leadership problem, and questions the political direction of the CP as a whole, particularly in relation to the socialist countries. I think that is a very incorrect position. It's not as simple as that.

John The new draft of the BRS has been a watershed in party argument and division. One of the problems which arose with the new BRS was that it tended, and it was certainly seen by some in the party, radically to break with our traditional communist perspective. This break has been exaggerated, but a tendency developed to read the BRS as though there was now to be a view of socialism totally at variance with the experience of the socialist countries, to be a strategy which represented a total break with traditional communist stratgies. In this way we were confronted, and this particularly emerges in Eurocommunist theory, with a series of antitheses like the democratic road as opposed to a dictatorial one, the need for socialism based on consent rather than coercion, for a parliamentary road rather an insurrectionist one. The effect of this kind of analysis was actually to deepen differences in the party. That had the consequence of provoking a sectarian and dogmatic backlash, which stressed the old completely at the expense of the new. So the concept of the broad democratic alliance, which is immensely important and positive, was overshadowed by a tendency to pose this against the organised working class, as though there was an opposition between them.

Jane It sounds as if the people you describe as clinging to the old are the innocent victims, John. I don't know if that's what you intend, but I don't agree with it. In my opinion, it was much more deliberate than you suggest, they never wanted to accept those things however they were presented, they saw certain things that they believed in being changed in 1977 with adoption of the BRS and they were opposed to it.

But I would like to add to the context in which we are looking at this. What characterises the present present Tory government is its very authoritarian and arrogant style of politics. This has provoked, among some sections of the Left, a style which is also characterised by arrogance and authoritarianism. One way of seeing the differences in the CP is in terms of an authoritarian trend as opposed to a democratic trend. Certainly, the people associated with *Straight Left*, of whom I've got some experience in the Midlands, are of the former ilk — in the way they approach their supporters, our members, people outside the party, their view of what they are aiming for and how they are going to achieve what they're aiming for. It's a very authoritarian way of going about things.

Dave I used to think, when active in the Young Communist League, that the arguments I was involved in were peculiar to the CP. But I've grown a bit wiser since then, and the more people I meet, the more I come to think there is something very real in our working class movement which fuels sectarian political attitudes, be it in the Labour Party, the CP or whatever.

I think the BRS, our perspective for revolutionary change, is totally at variance with much of the historical experiences of socialist countries. With the exception of Czechoslovakia, all the socialist countries have experienced revolutionary change in conditions without a large working class and without conditions of political democracy. Our conception of revolutionary change is different from the strategy of the communist parties which were involved in revolutionary transformation in such conditions. That doesn't mean that we don't take sides in the international division of class forces and recognise the advances, but it's foolish not to face up to the differences. Some people in the CP, and in the Labour Party as well, don't take account sufficiently of the changes in the working class. There's a narrow restricted view of the working class which still sees it basically as the industrial proletariat. Obviously the industrial proletariat has a decisive role to play, to use its strength not only on its own behalf but for all who face oppression and exploitation. That's not in dispute looking around this table. But a lot of people do not take account of the vast extension of white collar membership. Another aspect is the division around pluralism. The CP is fundamentally committed by successive congresses to a view of socialism in which there is plurality of political forces in the achievement of revolutionary change and political pluralism after it.

Lou What worries a lot of comrades is the tone of the debate. We seem to have moved away from the communist tradition of engaging in very intense debate, having very sharp differences, and eventually arriving at a decision and all fighting for those decisions. People are not prepared to face the issues on their own merit, but characterise the people who have different positions. It's not expressed in a comradely way. And the way we conduct it now is a barrier to people being drawn to the CP.

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What emerges from this discussion is that there isn't a consensus in the party at the moment around certain issues which many people conceive as fundamental to the nature of the party. This takes us back to a point John made earlier, when he spoke of the party's identity crisis. Now what do you see as the party's appropriate identity, its role in the 80s. And how does it differ from previously?

Dave I'd like to try and answer that question by itemising things which I think only the CP can provide, which isn't to say others can't make an important contribution. Because the CP attempts to apply Marxism creatively to the situations facing us, one of the first things you look for in the CP which we would not expect to find in other sections of the Left, is an ability to identify the next stage and how we are going to achieve it. It must on this basis be capable of giving leadership *in practice* — to help the working class movement unite an anti-Tory majority in the first instance and ultimately to move to a more far-reaching stage. Communists must be alive to all the new questions, feminism, anti-racism, the aspirations of the Welsh and Scottish people. In other words we must see within the CP a generosity and tolerance, a microcosm of what we want to see in society, of the broad democratic alliance of all working people. Finally, the CP's view of politics can be described as mass politics rather than resolutionary politics. It's not reliant on the leave-it-up-to-the-council type of politics. It is a particularly communist conception of democracy which is about the self-activity of the working people.

Jane What we're arguing is that struggle around the exploitation of a class is of vital importance, but it has to be connected with the other forms of oppression that people experience in all those different ways that they live. That is a really distinctive feature of the party, the conception of very different forms of oppression where the struggles around them can be brought together.

Lou I've got a clear memory of why I joined the CP. I remember the formal snap. I was in the Labour Party then, and at a management committee meeting they elected a right-wing publisher as our constituency's Labour candidate. I reached the conclusion from that decision that the CP, and I knew a lot of Communists, was the only party that had a clear perspective for ending capitalism. I had a simple view then, as an apprentice, but it's still basically true that there are those that exploit and those that are exploited. On that basis, I joined the CP. I also had a tremendous sense of affinity with the Soviet Union and what had been achieved there. Today, in the midst of the crisis of the labour movement, my conviction gets stronger because I can see the crisis of capitalism.

To what extent do you think an electoral perspective for the party is crucial to the kind of party you are talking about?

John I feel increasingly that our electoral policy does need reconsideration. If you look back to 1935, after the swing to the popular front, the party contested far more selectively then than we do now and won substantial votes for its candidates. Our electoral policy as it stands is actually in contradiction to the broad democratic alliance because we put up Communist candidates in situations where they haven't already won and often aren't in a position to win the confidence and support of broad sections of the movement including sections of the Labour Party. And this is in a situation not only of the menace of Thatcherism, but where Labour is more willing and more responsive to unity with Communists than it has ever been before.

Jane I would like to defend our right to stand in elections. People expect political parties to contest elections and they begin to ask, if we don't stand, what's this peculiar kind of political party that's not taking part in elections. But having said that, we do have to look at the reality of what happens to us in elections. We do have to take into account the intense demoralisation Party members feel when election after election, the vote is so small. I don't know quite what we do about it, however.

Lou In the context of politics in Britain, to win a parliamentary majority is part of the political struggle, part of the class struggle. For the CP to abandon that part of the struggle brings into question its very independence as a political party and I believe the step beyond that is to liquidate the party on the basis that we should not contest against Labour; why not go the full hog and say what is the need for a CP? Now this question of unity. I don't believe we're going to get a meaningful unity involving Labour on the electoral front unless we build further support on which to base that unity. And I don't believe we can build that further support for our political position unless we contest. My experience has been that contests have not been divisive in our relationships with the Labour Party. My experience is that some of the closest relationships with the Labour Party have been achieved where we contest.

Under what circumstances do you see the CP halting its long membership decline and beginning to grow?

Dave The CP doesn't exist in a vacuum, it's unlikely therefore, that the conditions for our regeneration are going to be peculiar to us and not be part of a wider upsurge and revitalisation of the Left. People will join the CP in increasing numbers when they see something quite distinctive the CP has to offer. This distinctiveness must draw on the traditions and realities of our Labour movement, it can't be separatist or sectarian. But when people see that the CP adds something which they'll get from no one else then we can begin to grow. In practice this means the application, in a more decisive way than hitherto, of the ideas contained in the BRS, because the conception of the broad democratic alliance is the most significant, creative development of Marxism in Britain in recent years. But it's not been put into practice to any extent.

John We need much greater stress on co-ordinating all the different efforts of people in the CP so that they do feel we're making a much greater impact on events, hence my dissent earlier on the question of electoral policy. There is also the international question as well. We shouldn't understate the sense in which people join the CP because they feel some sense of pride and sympathy for the actual achievements and experience of the socialist countries. We need to respect these realities,critically evaluate them, and draw upon them in such a way as to make people feel they're part of a unified international movement, they're part of a unified working class movement in Britain. If we can put those together more effectively than we've done in the past, I think we'll have greater unity in the party, and we will begin to raise morale and membership.

Lou There's obviously got to be certain objective conditions. One of those is the level of activity among the mass of the people. When involved in activity, people are questioning and are reaching out for solutions. If the CP is part of that activity, then people will look to it. We also need a much greater level of unity within the party. □

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PAUL PICCONE

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Channel Five

Interview with
PETER PRESTON
Mike Power

Peter Preston became editor of the *Guardian* in June, 1975 at the age of 36 when the circulation was 320,000; it now stands at 450,000. He has worked at the paper since 1963, previously he was with the *Liverpool Daily Post*.
As a student he was active in the Oxford University Liberal Association. Believing that reporters should not be involved in political activities in general he has never since joined a political party. Here he talks to Mike Power.

Firstly, could you tell me how you came to be appointed editor?

There was a feeling in 1975 when Alistair Hetherington was giving up after 19 years as editor, that the Trust[1] should attempt to find some method of appointing a new editor which involved the widest level of consultation. They came up with a scheme where the trustees appointed a recommendation panel who were to interview everybody. On that panel were some trustees, one or two of the company managers, and representatives of the journalists. I wouldn't say it was a papal democracy but there was a strong element of allowing the journalists to say who they would best like to serve as editor. Whether the scheme will work again I'm not sure. It was to that extent 'one-off', but it has been used a couple of times since then for choosing editors of the *Manchester Evening News*.

Do the journalists and heads of departments regularly discuss content and balance in the newspaper?

Yes, although it's impossible to run a daily newspaper on a model of complete democracy. I have regular weekly meetings with heads of departments, and longer meetings once a month.

On the *Guardian* there is no line handed down from above, what the paper says is very much what we, as leader writers, or as heads of departments, or as a team, actually think and how we react to events. There is no Murdoch or Rothermere figure telling us that we must say this, or that now is the time to be nice to the government, or to be nasty to the government, or that Mr Meacher would be better than Mr Hattersley, or vice versa.

The Guardian's *circulation has been going up steadily despite its refusal to participate in the Bingo War. How do you feel about the circulation war being conducted in various parts of Fleet Street?*

People talk about the national press in Britain but, in fact, the term does not really mean a great deal at the moment. At one end of the market there is the most full-throated of tabloid wars, and, at the other end, the quality papers, though they sometimes get bogged down in such things, attempt to conduct themselves in a different fashion. That's obviously one of the difficulties facing the Newspaper Publishers Association (NPA). We now have such a diverse membership that the common interests between rival proprietors are very slender. Bingo is a good example of this, with the good old Fleet Street tactic of buying readership.

In the 1920s or 30s the papers would have been giving away free crystal sets, insurance or books: now it's bingo with its various ramifications. Basically the papers with the biggest resources are going to keep spending while the others are 'dead in the water'.

In the heavier end of the market it's always a matter of debate quite what weight one attaches to cover price policy. When Lord Thompson was selling the *Times*, for example, he made it clear to potential buyers that the Thompson strategy for making *The Times* a viable newspaper was to promote it as a quality newspaper with a quality price. One would have expected to see its circulation rising, more or less in tandem with the *Financial Times*. After the last 3½ years, Mr Murdoch, after some initial difficulties, decided that his way to try to make something of the *Times* is to compete with the *Telegraph*, and to begin competing very hard in price terms.

So the group with the biggest resources can use them, either to out-spend their bingo rivals, or on racking up £10m or £20m losses in order to fight a cover price war, to drive frailer ships in economic terms, not in circulation terms, like the *Telegraph*, into very heavy water.

My own feeling, without trying to be too 'Simon pure' about it, is that I do think the business of trying to operate a serious newspaper is fundamentally different. It is impossible to get into a situation where there isn't strong competition in circulation and in advertising, but the *Guardian* has never had the massive resources to play with in that league and frankly we have not wanted to.

You have claimed that the Guardian *does not speak for any political party but for a set of values involving caring for people and upholding a coherent pattern of life in Britain. Would you still endorse that position?*

Yes. The paper has a tradition of independence, it has a political position which has changed in specific circumstances many times in the past, but which is basically on the side of change, in the belief that human beings by their own efforts can develop a more just and caring society. It's not conservative with a small c or a big C, although in 1952 Wadsworth thought that a

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Conservative government was probably the best, and that's what was recommended.

What we try to do in our feature pages is to provide what is lacking in the British Press, which is a consistent forum for debate. We're anxious on the one hand to have the views of Enoch Powell or Teddy Taylor, but also Eric Hobsbawm or Tony Benn. The leader column, although it is a judgement and, hopefully a considered judgement, is basically no more than a contribution to an argument: it is not 'what the paper says'.

If there is a set of values, there must be a list of priorities and objectives. What would you say they were?

As a paper we have a number of traditons and a number of strengths — in no particular order. They would include individual access in that we encourage people with differing views to write. I remember David English saying to me when the *Mail* was in one of its turbulent periods — 'it's all right for you Preston, you run that sort of paper where it can all hang out'. It's not a homogenised product, we actually encourage that though obviously we do have a strong commitment to democracy and freedom. Thereafter one is talking in specific terms. For example, in the area of the welfare state we argue for richer people to care for those who can't cope or find it difficult to cope. We are talking in terms of a redistributive society but we are not a political party and so those central concerns come out in various tones with various degrees of vehemence.

Do you feel that, given the values you have outlined, the Guardian *should be taking a more campaigning political stance against the positions of the present government?*

I can't think of many positions of the present government which we are wholeheartedly in favour of. I think it is the word 'campaigning' that I would gag over for a second. We, in fact, run a large number of what you could call campaigns, especially in the social services, or in terms of a whole variety of government documents which have been brought to public notice via the *Guardian* over the past two years.

I think one tries to do one's job as a newspaper, which is to put into public debate facts and situations which the public was not aware of. But I don't want to be in a situation — and this fits well with what we tended to write in some instances about the Labour Party — where one has one narrow band of activists addressing an audience of another narrow band of activists and, in our view, this is one of the things which has obviously contributed to the last poor general election result for Labour. This can happen very easily in newspapers. We have a breakdown of readership in terms of how people voted at previous elections. It is roughly 35/40% Labour, 25% floaters or centrists some of whom did not vote, and 25% Conservative voters. I want to serve all of these people.

I know that the Guardian *has a concern for the welfare state. Is it the policy of the paper to encourage leaks?*

Our business is to get information which we think should be put before the public and this includes all information about the workings of government. It is the only way democracy functions properly. Britain is in one sense a democratic country, but it's not by any means a perfect democracy. It is extremely imperfect in a whole number of ways, not least in the ludicrous way in which information and argument is choked off in Whitehall. It's the prime job of the paper to try to get as many facts and as many arguments out of that Whitehall nexus and into the light of day.

Your reference to Whitehall and the ludicrous restraints obviously calls to mind the problems of the Official Secrets Act. Do you favour a Freedom of Information Act?

I think I do. Newspapers would hugely benefit from the kind of freedom of information legislation based on the US model, although the US is not a perfect example of a fully democratic press system. In big cities, for example, one group may own both the morning and evening newspapers, and here freedom of information can be very much a question of ownership stakes. In this country at least we do have some competition; it is imperfect and I just feel in those circumstances a Freedom of Information Act would probably work as well if not better.

Can we talk about the Women's Page? There has been some criticism recently from feminists who feel that there have been fairly substantial changes made in the coverage. How do you think the women's movement should be reflected in the paper?

I was features editor when we first began to devote a whole page to women's interests. I worked for a long time with Mary Stott who was beginning to explore concerns which were untraditional in terms of Fleet Street women's pages: pressure groups, self-help groups. The general level of debate helped women readers to argue and

[1] The *Guardian* is owned by a trust.

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think about their conditions, and sometimes to do something about it.

There has been no change in editorial policy. What some of the criticism has centred on is the amount of coverage of cookery etc. This is only a continuation of coverage under previous women editors. When Liz Forgan was running the page she talked to Katie Stewart and we began to run some of those occasional cooking series. It's a question of getting the right sort of balance. The page has always been read by many men; the percentage is about 60% women and 40% men. It is also a very highly read page. I think this is valuable. One of the arguments we've always had in the *Guardian* is whether the true feminist interest is served by having a page which has women at the top at all, ie, is it more or less feminist to have something which puts gender at the top of the page and which would seem to indicate that this is for women — why not for men? At one stage we removed the designation from the page entirely. I think the only thing I'd say at this point, is that I do think it's a mistake for the feminist movement to perceive everything in terms of a dialogue between some people here, and them. The Women's Page has always been broader, and deliberately broader, than those concerned, although it has been the essence to reflect women's growing feeling of change about themselves and about their conditions. The feminist movement that you and I remember from the 70s has changed, has run into some *cul-de-sacs*, has found new ways to open up. I think it would be wrong for people to take a 1975 model of what the feminist movement was about, compare it with a *Guardian* Women's Page of today, and say that that page has betrayed this or that.

Many people felt that during the Falklands war the Guardian *conducted itself in a non-committed way. How did you develop your editorial line?*

It is completely true that specialists looking at the situation did not take the Argentinian claim to the Falkands as lightly as it was taken in Whitehall. So I don't think one can say that anything which happened was completely unexpected.

It is always a difficult problem for newspapers. When something is happening that one does not like and does not approve of, does one rail against it by saying — this is all a mistake — day by day. Or do you say we don't like this but it's happening and there is no means of stopping it. And therefore, we did perceive it as sensible, as the Task Force, wrapped in the flag, was ploughing for those weeks south, to lend every wit of argument we could on the need to negotiate and on the need to find a peaceful solution.

It would have been too easy through those weeks to have gone on about the fact that the Task Force was a mistake and should be called back. I know that was a view held in certain sections, particularly on the Left. Our view was clear. It would have been best to have adjusted to the situation and best, explicitly said, if the Task Force had not been sent. But our view was that the thing was not going to be called back: it had been despatched by all parties in the House of Commons. So, does one provide the best service as a paper by attempting to argue and to seek out the possibilities in a running situation, rather than in a sense to opt out of everything by saying we should not have sent the thing in the first place, we demand that it be called back?

I was very much involved with the Falklands war on a day-to-day basis and was aware how much things were changing day by day. I'm not very far away from many of the things that have been written by Anthony Barnett and others, not in terms of the extrapolations based on it, but on my general feelings about it. As the Task Force moved on it became clear that there was in fact a complete dichotomy between the concept of the Task Force as something that could make peace, and the fact that the nearer it drew to the Falklands the more impossible that became. But one was extremely anxious all the time to try to maximise every possibility of peace, and frankly there were opportunities at a number of stages, where if one or two things more had fallen into place, then it might all have been different.

The Guardian *has made a fairly consistent critique of the other end of the newspaper market. It has criticised the government for handing out knighthoods and various ennoblements to editors and proprietors — presumably for political services rendered — and has also criticised the commercialisation of the press. What do you think ought to be done about the problems of cheque-book journalism and the lowering of journalistic standards in general?*

Well I think one is looking at a situation where those of us who want to work through the Press Council and strengthen it, will find ourselves faced eventually with a government which wants to legislate and produce a statutory body to supervise press standards. We've said before that the place to start is probably with the NPA because it only needs (since I'm sure IPC would go along with it) Lord Matthews, Mr Murdoch and Lord Rothermere to sit down around a table and say we wish various forms of competition to be ruled out. Maybe one is asking for the moon, but it seems a modest proposal — something which they all condemn separately.

The Press Council needs more resources, although I'm not sure that it ought to have government funding because, as I have tried to indicate, government and the press are constantly in a form of tension, and should be. There is nothing worse than having little government quangos, funded essentially by government, flopping around in every area.

The press tends to be owned by individuals, even large monopolies, but broadcasting is perceived by statute to be balanced and impartial. Do you not think there is a problem here in terms of media freedom?

Yes. But I think there are defects on both sides. I think, historically, the restraining hand of the IBA or the BBC Board Of Governors has been one that has inhibited the development of a whole variety of voices, particularly political voices in British society, and the spectrum of balance over which those bodies preside is narrower than you actually find. So that's on the down side there in terms of the commercial daily press.

I can't see philosophically how you can be, on the one hand, for freedom, and be against a man who can afford it being able to set up a newspaper or magazine. Whilst newspapers are severally owned ie, some are straightforwardly proprietorial, others like IPC or the *Guardian* have very different and less individualised means of ownership. As long as there is this variety in types of ownership it seems to me that the defects of the proprietorial press are somewhat ameliorated, and whilst I can understand the arguments for making the press like the BBC, from my own conversations with people in the Corporation they are very vulnerable, and I would not connive at the government controlling more of the broadcasting output, or being able to directly influence the content of the press any more than they are able to at present.

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RADIO FRANCHISES

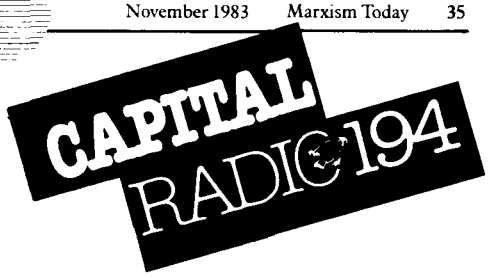
Thomas O'Malley

Last month the IBA awarded Capital Radio another eight year contract (1984-92) to play pop music and advertisements and make millions of pounds. The London General and Entertainment Independent Local Radio (ILR) contract, which has been held by Capital since 1973, had been readvertised under the terms of the 1981 Broadcasting Act. Other ILR contracts due to be readvertised in the coming years include: Piccadilly, Metro, Swansea, Hallam, City (1984); Forth, Plymouth, Tees, Trent, Pennine, Victory, Orwell (1985); 210, Downtown, Beacon (1986). The readvertisement of the most successful contract in ILR provides an opportunity to take stock of the commercial radio system.

Commercial radio has produced some large profits over the years. In 1981/2 ILR revenue totalled £60.75m. In the same period Capital had a turnover of £15.7m, and between 1976 and 1982 made over £12m in profits. As well as being the most financially successful ILR station, Capital provides the best example of developments in ownership and programming within ILR over the first eleven years of the system's history.

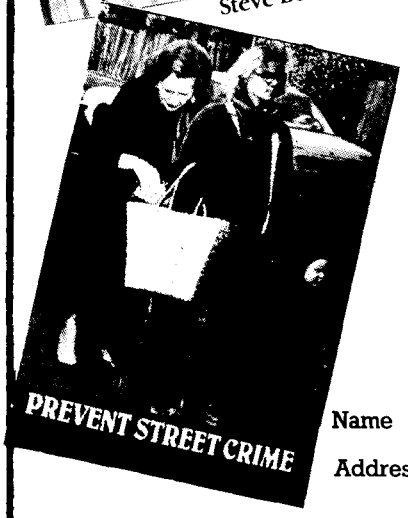
Patterns of ownership in ILR are largely the same as those in TV, films and publishing. The IBA has, in some instances, encouraged the tendency for the larger, more profitable stations, to extend their influence within ILR; for example, Capital holds shares in Chiltern Radio and Southern Sound. Large corporate interests have, in this way, been allowed to build up extensive holdings within ILR. Capital's principal shareholder, Standard Broadcasting UK is the British arm of a Canadian media multinational, and has holdings in 14 other ILR stations.

Capital is part of a web of corporate ownership and influence which includes London's other commercial radio station, LBC, and the weekday commercial TV contractor, Thames TV. The link is through the multinational British Electric Traction, (BET), which has interests in transport, leisure, publishing and the privatisation of local authority services. BET companies have interests in two



Capital shareholders: Rediffusion Radio Holdings and Local News of London. Thames TV is partly owned by a company (A-R Television) which is owned by BET and Rediffusion plc — BET owns 65% of Rediffusion plc and the chairman of LBC, Christopher Chataway, sits on BET's board (*Labour Research* July 1983).

This pattern of ownership has an overt political dimension since Chataway was the Tory minister responsible for introducing ILR in 1972, and last year BET gave £10,000 to Tory Party funds. The Tories are presiding over a rapid expansion of ILR (up to 69 stations by the end of the decade) and have recently agreed, in principle, to allow the IBA to run a national commercial radio network by 1990. The IBA has said that the new network will most likely be run by a consortium of existing ILR contractors — a move which would mark yet another step towards the extension of



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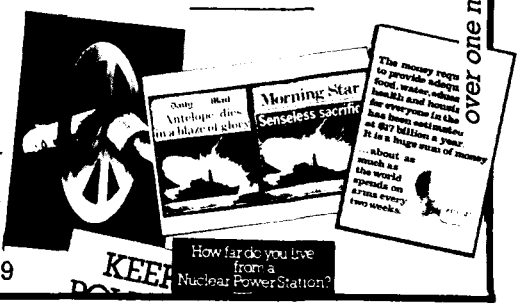

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corporate interests in broadcasting. The Tories have consistently backed ILR because they see benefits in the extension of private ownership in broadcasting.

Tory support for ILR has been well rewarded. Capital, and ILR stations in general, express the interests of their owners through the programmes broadcast, which are narrow, consumerist and unchallenging. In the most recent of its three studies of Capital, *Capital: Local Radio and Private Profit* (Comedia/LRW 1983), Local Radio Workshop has explored the relationship between private ownership and programming on the station. Capital's programme consists, largely, of white, sexist DJs playing a narrow range of commercially produced pop records in between advertisements. The desire to make profits dictates that programming is uncontentious, so as not to upset advertisers, and that it is cheap. This type of broadcasting reduces radio to musical wallpaper, safe in its studious avoidance of controversy and conformist in its celebration of consumerism.

Capital, like other ILR stations, broadcasts very little programming which can be described as 'local' in any meaningful sense. Over the last nine years ILR has redefined 'local' as meaning traffic and weather checks, together with what has become known as 'social action broadcasting' ie, short announcements offering advice, appealing for money or volunteers on behalf of local charities, or advertising off-air telephone referral services. Capital has pioneered this form of 'local' involvement and has an array of schemes with titles like *Helpline*, *Jobmate*, the *London Project* etc. These activities were conceived in the mid-70s to avoid using up money producing programmes about, and with, local people: a form of broadcasting which treats social issues as discrete and unrelated and proposes remedies which conform to current Tory social policy. The Tory minister Patrick Jenkin has written that: 'Pouring even more money into the statutory sector cannot be the answer. We must . . . encourage . . . people to help themselves and their fellow citizens. That is the way ahead, and the social action media will help open it up for us'.

The IBA has actively encouraged all of these developments in ILR, and rarely, if at all, used its powers under the 1981 Act to make the stations provide programming 'calculated to appeal to the tastes and outlook' of persons served by ILR stations. So, commercial local radio sounds very much the same wherever you live. ILR stations are what they are largely because of the nature of their ownership and the failure of the IBA to supervise them properly.

Opposition to the present state of affairs is essential. Fighting to make the stations adhere to existing programming obligations, making the IBA more open and accountable to the public, and building a strong base of independent programme-making organisations are vital parts of any developed strategy to democratise broadcasting. The need to argue the case for bringing ILR into public ownership is essential if the Tory backed tide of privatisation in radio is to be stemmed. This can only be done successfully by winning support for the view that privately financed radio cannot provide a fully developed radio service, and that such a service can only be provided by defending and extending public control over broadcasting. The coming wave of readvertisements provides good opportunities to make these sorts of arguments.

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HIP LITTLE ENGLANDERS

Marek Kohn

Now that Thatcherism has passed beyond its adolescence, its mascots are more mature than they used to be: Sir Clive Sinclair has become the thinking Tory's Sir Freddie Laker. But we can still see one of those vulgar, squeaky business brats in action every few weeks on BBC1. Jonathan King was a seventies music industry Laker, one of those gimmick-laden self-publicists who, no matter how rich he became, would always be a small businessman at heart. His chief contribution to the 'new wave' of pop in the late seventies was to issue a picture disc decorated with a naked woman on his 'UK' record label, and (as befits a selfless patriot) to export himself to America. He is a pop nationalist, one of the obvious Patriotism for Profit species. There are other sorts, some in very different guises.

Every so often, King sends back a little bulletin from exile on the US pop charts which is broadcast on *Top Of The Pops*. The peculiarly irritating thing about these offerings is his relentless pursuit of his great theme, the success of British acts in the States. This obsession with what's good for Britain is rather like the permanent let's-put-Britain-back-on-its-feet burden of the old *Nationwide* under Frank Bough. If King ever comes back, he'll probably start urging us all to buy British records instead of foreign ones.

King's tinny nationalism combines the aggressive banality of Thatcher's thoughts with that curious deviation in patriotism, that of the sixties. The Union Flag was everywhere, but for the first time it was hung with a tinge of irony. A generation with a grasp of camp, an ability to look at things in lots of different ways at once, found new ways to be proud to be British. It meant being swinging, coy, childish and fun. You could Back Britain and fly the flag, but that campaign caught on because it was a way to be unequivocally patriotic and still have a tinge of that tantalising swing. The campness of pop let British musicians like the Beatles and the Rolling Stones wear their Britishness both with pride and with a shady ambiguity. Pop led this bizarre transmutation of traditional nationalistic values.

Jonathan King is a happy man today, because British groups are once again storming America. The new British 'invasion' is spearheaded by groups like the Human League and Culture Club. One of Culture Club star Boy George's greatest achievements has been to charm away the fears aroused by his gender-distorting appearance. For somebody who inside the pop hothouse is catty beyond any hope of reform, his public manners are almost always breath-takingly impeccable. The face the outageous George wears when he's on mainstream TV or abroad shames Royals like Princess Anne, who is paid a fortune just to behave well in front of foreigners. George sets himself apart from orthodox politics as he does from orthodox sexuality, so his patriotism is muted. But he knows how to behave, and he is the perfect pop ambassador. Duran Duran are more bullish and utterly conventional. They make neo-colonial promotional videos: black women stymied as animals, photogenic poverty in paradise (now discredited — the location was Sri Lanka!). Before the June election, the group's guitarist, Andy Taylor, declared, 'I'm a Royalist. I love my country. After seeing everywhere else, I only want to live here, so I'll be voting Tory.' Britain has a legion of such willing ambassadors who don't need any headmasterly lectures on representing the country while abroad.

Most of these invisible exports are loosely loyal — they aren't so much proud to be British as quite pleased to be so if they happen to think of it. Noisy nationalism is scarce. Even for a group like Madness, who are as British as Beefeaters, it mainly means being sentimental, nostalgic and easygoing. For them this shows real maturity. Early in their career, some of the very short haired company they kept raised questions about their politics. Despite their protestations, Madness never seemed as transparently honest about their opposition to racism and the National Front as their fellow 2-Tone artists the Specials. Nowadays they have put a great distance between themselves and their youth, but have kept a Britishness — a London-ness, to be more precise — which echoes that of soft, childlike sixties pop. No doubt some of their old North London Skins crowd now follow Skrewdriver, whose handbills bray about how the music press won't advertise their gigs because they are 'patriotic'. But Skrewdriver, whose current single is called *White Power*, are part of a very tiny minority.

You don't have to be an especially vulgar Marxist to find the lack of nationalistic sentiment in British pop a little surprising. After all, where would either be without spectacle? The chief kind of nationalism in pop has always been anti-Americanism. Pop itself has thrived in the difference between Britain and the States, and British musicians have always congratulated themselves on making American music better than the Americans. Punk made this attitude an aggressive one, and identified all the complacency and decadence of mid-seventies rock with America. Anti-Americanism stood for a moral crusade and a new broom. Punk was powered by the chip on its shoulder, and at times its inflated rhetoric sounded like that of Third World guerillas fighting the Yankee, with all the self-indulgence and hyperbole that that comparison implies. Contempt for American music became the accepted posture, and like all thoughtless stances, it soon lost the force it first had. Very few people paid much attention to that side of it which was nothing more than a hip version of the Little England mentality.

Another aspect of pop that is at odds with the grown-up world is its attitude to class. Occasionally it likes to play at being very rich and drinking a river of cocktails, but much more often it dreams of the working class. This was never more true than in punk. Oppression and subjection were seen in class terms, and it sparked a reconstruction of a working class that was as British and as real as Lymeswold. Above all, value was attached to image and style. Political stances were created from a vivid mixture of clothes, emblems, prejudices and morals which evaded both 'common sense' and the rationalist schemes of the Left. Socialism was both part of what was seen as the working-class tradition, and the force behind the anti-racist politics that turned out to be the main political issue in

Boy George of Culture Club

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pop at the time. After a while, it took an awesome amount of faith and a tongue in the cheek to believe in punk any longer: older touchstones rose to help. For *Sounds* writer Garry Bushell, who is a populist or he is nothing, peer group pressure was a worry. He made his name through punk and had to defend it, be the most proletarian creature who ever walked the streets, and cover up for his skinhead associates. Bushell is a socialist and a Labour supporter who can't separate patriotism from socialism. A council estate Nelson, he can see no Nazis where nationalism and socialism (or rather, populist anti-capitalist sentiment) mix. He needs patriotism to keep him on the street.

An early solution was to foster 'Oi', a sanitised skinhead cult. It made the headlines in 1981, after skinheads going to an Oi gig provoked a riot in Southall. The bands involved couldn't get work after that, and asking for a meeting with Rock Against Racism to clean up their image. Bushell played the mediator while the Oi delegation, who had a grasp of sociology worthy of any rehabilitated gangster, explained how they were part of a 'violent, territorial subculture'. Their politics were what fitted their hyperproletarian self-image, which left little room for threatening notions like those of feminism. After quite a lot of this, the single woman present eventually inquired about the place of women in Oi. One of the faction, with all the assurance of full-blooded Cockney condescension, told her that 'where I come from, sexism's a joke'. And that is the heart of the matter. Nationalism in pop at this level springs from the sense of territory felt by young men. 'Where I come from' ends up meaning British.

It doesn't have to. After Spandau Ballet emerged in a welter of well-publicised elitism and pretentious pseudo-classical graphic design, some critics who paid too much attention to the record sleeves started mumbling about 'fascism'. This red herring drew the charge of elitism in its wake, and Spandau decided to have it both ways. They were both the nightclub set and Islington boys who grew up on council estates and whose brothers still worked in the print. Gary Kemp compared his group to a trade union. In fact, they do remain close to their patch, tend to get down to the same club every Saturday night: they've stuck to their territory, and they don't need to raise their eyes to the Nation.

Other voices, influenced by punk but disconnected from pack peer groups, try to be patriotic but not Tory. Channel 4's delinquent presenter, Keith Allen, once did a stage show in which he tried to claim the feeling he had in his bones for Wales, his native country, for the Left. By the night of the election, when he presented a live television commentary in the character of a security guard, he wanted to capture the feelings roused by *Land Of Hope And Glory* from the Right. *New Musical Express* editor Neil Spencer has written a pamphlet arguing the same case. For the best-known writer to have been forged in punk, Julie Burchill, patriotism has come to fill the place once occupied by anti-racism. Like Allen, she doesn't distinguish between the nationalism of an imperial power and that of a colony. That is probably because nobody surpasses her in anti-Americanism, which takes the form of a sort of Old Testament Stalinism and a conviction that Britain's biggest problem is Uncle Sam's influence over 'her'.

It all came out last year, in the War. Burchill's monthly essay in *The Face* betrayed a breathless excitement that was sickeningly similar to the light in the eyes of her main target, Thatcher. Jolly, beery Bushell was later inspired to a jingoistic new mutation of rock journalism tha proudly defies parody: 'When 2 Para took Goose Green with a display of courage rarely seen outside of Hollywood movies they probably had little idea that a year later their valiant efforts would inspire a concept album as satisfyingly riotous raw-knuckled and rowdy as this demonically paced, dynamically diamond delight.

Probably not. But then, in their very different ways, Bushell and Burchill are obeying the most basic command of pop, which translates, roughly, as: 'Rejoice'. It happened to turn up in the affairs of state, and struck a chord.

Anybody who was in this country last year could see the strength and depth of patriotism in all its menacing rhetoric spelled out through the pubs, papers and crowds of the land. British pop isn't really part of this hard and bloody nation which is only revealed by grotesque and freakish conditions, like the Law'n'Order debate at each Conservative Party Conference. The curious co-existence of Boy George and *The Sun* reveals a problem for Thatcherism. It might, in theory, occupy the whole arena of ordinary politics and disperse the very idea of a Loyal Opposition, but outside conventional politics it faces a million impasses. *The Sun* can't unleash its Peter Tatchell innuendo machine on the man who Rolling Stone Ronnie Wood took to be 'a great looking girl', easy and cheap as it would be to do so, because it needs to support Boy George as well as Our Boys. Except that we are not talking about two nations. The young people who buy Culture Club and Soft Cell records are, as far as anyone can make out, indistinguishable in political sympathy from voters as a whole. They couldn't all have been indoors as the victory parades went by, and they probably believe that British pop is the best in the world.

Series of lectures at Marx House alternate Thursdays at 7.30 discussing the problems of regionalism and nationalism in Britain.

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THE FRINGE Spotlight

Paul Allen

Clifton Hall in Rotherham is an oldish building trying to look older, as chill and cheerless inside as the wet autumn night outside, despite the bar. In the main hall the 7:84 England company is performing, for one night only, the show that has just won an award at the Edinburgh Festival Fringe, *Spike in the First World War.* The stage is slightly raised, the audience is all on one level, which means those at the back can't see. We arrive to find the company still setting up, the start is late, lighting and technical aspects of a show with a very full, episodic story are sometimes muffed, and so is some of the acting. But the show itself, an engaging adaptation of Jaroslav Hasek by Jim Sheridan, which turns Svejk into a gormless Irishman whose idiot logic reduces the British army to tatters, is indulgently received by a large house. Laughter is usually around the corner, and good humour abounds.

A typical night out at the Fringe. What it only half conceals is the fact that the Fringe as it was known, loved and hated in its heyday, has changed. It has been beaten smooth between the hammer of the entrepreneurs and the anvil of the culture-politics bureaucrats whose jobs were quite properly created to counter the arbitrary effects of market forces.

At the Edinburgh Fringe this year there were hundreds of shows on offer, perhaps a thousand. I saw about 30, 3%. James Fenton of the *Sunday Times* and Michael Billington of the *Guardian* went on record as saying the Fringe was too big, unreviewable.

If only that were the problem. One of the strengths of the Fringe is that it cannot be 'managed' by critics. Unfortunately it is becoming managed by other people. There were two mega-venues on the Fringe, the Assembly Rooms, and Circuit, who operated in a series of tents in a large hole in the ground that was once earmarked for an opera house in more free-spending days. The Assembly Rooms is run by an offshoot of the Coutts banking family. Nobody should be surprised at the way the commercial interests have moved in on the Fringe: there's money to be made, as off-Broadway discovered, as the West End discovered with *Accidental Death of An Anarchist* and *Trafford Tanzi* and *Blood Brothers*, and as popular music — which invariably begins as 'alternative music' — invariably discovers.

Circuit didn't intend to make money and has made a loss. It may not happen at all next year. A more adventurous policy,

Spike in the First World War

involving performance art and dance companies from America and the astonishing but wholly unreliable company from Berlin whose *Ubu* was delayed three days and then never ran its course anyway. The three directors were unlucky, but their programme was based, again, on selection, not on the Fringe principle of access to the public for any company whatever their skills or their track record.

The real Fringe, in contrast, is forced further and further away from the centre of the city, from the audience, from serious attention, and from any serious chance of real fun. The point is not that there are no good shows on the Fringe any more; there are. But the emphasis is on a guarantee of quality, and that in turn makes it likelier that the type of entertainment which succeeds will be of a variety rather than a dramatic nature. Thus at the Assembly Rooms you couldn't get into the Tom Robinson Band's cabaret, or Stand-Up Comedy with Andy de la Tour (a bit predictable), Ben Elton (funny and challenging, but he should try a few old-fashioned comedy audiences) and Rik Mayall (the alternative superstar). Victoria Wood sold out early on. Jugglers, mime artists, the art-rock of The Flying Pickets — all performed excellently and undisturbingly. For a political dimension you had to look to companies like the black South Africans, Soyikwa Theatre Company, whose political messages literally stopped the show and must detonate like grenades in a Soweto audience and whose performing skills put those of the British theatre, mainstream or fringe, to shame.

The audiences include an identifiable strand of potential bookers, the local authority community arts officers finding material for the nation's arts centres, the left-ish Arts Association staff who are looking for suitable material for Trades Clubs and the like. All good, but all relatively safe, all part of the corporatism for which, if Mrs Thatcher's right, Joe Public has not much sympathy left.

Spike in the First World War is on its way, at the time of writing, to the West Midlands, the South and West, London and Merseyside before a run in Dublin later this month. A Black Theatre season is about to open at the Arts Theatre in London and run through December.

The Medieval Players, a minor hit at Edinburgh with a bawdy, skilful account of Rabelais' *Gargantua*, are opening a tour of a 15th century French farce, *Master Peter Pathelin*. I hope to see them all. I also believe we shouldn't hope for too much from the Fringe, shouldn't rely on it to do work we somehow can't get done in the resourceful (comparatively speaking) main houses; after all, the great Fringe success story, Tom Stoppard's *Rosencrantz and Guildenstern Are Dead*, was never other than a middle-brow hit — it didn't change anything.

I am reminded that back in 1975 Howard Brenton was telling readers of *Theatre Quarterly* that the Fringe was dead, because talented people wanted to get into the big new theatres where the audience was. He is currently back at the Royal Court Theatre with *The Genius*, a theatre which isn't Fringe exactly but prides itself on being 'alternative.' His play hinges partly on the independent life of pure thought, in this case mathematical knowledge, with deadly possibilities which cannot be unthought or lost. I like to believe that the spirit of the Fringe, similarly anarchic and potentially frightening, is merely dormant; drugged by big money and officialdom but not dead.

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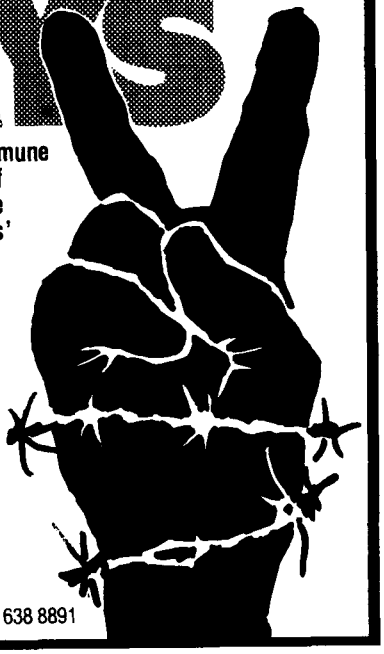

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magine the situation in British terms, if ou can: Ewan MacColl heads a mass opular movement for the creation of a enuinely national style of music, free from he Yankee hegemony of rock 'n' roll, the ultural reflection of the remodelling of ociety by a broad democratic alliance, while Reagan frets and the CIA plots a Thatcherite coup. . .

The imagination runs out of steam, for while our need is as great (though Thatcher's return to Victorian values has not begun to bite — yet — as deeply as the poverty of Latin America), the musical luminaries who could lead such a musical *risorgimento* are too bedevilled by their own narrowness of vision, stylistic mannerisms and quasi-revolutionist posturings to ever do anything but flee in terror from any movement that might ever be truly mass.

At the urging of largely leftist critics and performers in the 60s, Britain's then still expanding folk revival began to re-examine the roots of its own traditions. But the result was not an injection of native savour into a pop music grown tired and remote from the vigour of the truly popular, but the kind of elitist flight from reality familiar from the typical contemporary British folk club, in which pewter-tankarded, ageing males sing rescued relics from the dung-heap of folk history, about the massacre of whales, the seduction of compliant milk-maids, and the happy lot of the peasantry in the days before the agricultural workers' union and mass literacy gave them the tools with which to transform society.

To anyone who has struggled, it must have seemed at times vainly, against the enemies of promise within the folk revival, Joan Jara's warm, inspiring and ultimately hopeful book must shine like a beam of southern hemisphere sunshine into the grey, disillusioned world of Thatcherite Britain.

The terrible outlines of the story are familiar to democrats throughout the world: how Victor Jara, the singer-actor-director of peasant origin helped forge a mass popular song movement against the context of Allende's attempt to find a peaceful transition to socialism, and how their hopes were thwarted by the coup which blocked Chilean progress for over a decade. Victor Jara has become a mythic symbol of the 70s and 80s, to be set alongside those of previous eras, what Guevara was to the 60s, the Rosenbergs to the 50s, Woody Guthrie and Paul Robeson to the 40s, van der Lubbe and Lorca to the 30s. But the mythic quality of Victor Jara's life and death can obscure the very real humanity behind the myth and it is the great power of Joan Jara's story that the real man is allowed to emerge from the cloudy heroism, and paradoxically this enlarges rather than diminishes his ability to move us to anger, and to action.

Though Joan Jara is one of the most genuinely modest and self-effacing people you could ever meet, without any trace of mock humility, the book also ends up as being a very moving portrait of her — this rather inexperienced and politically naive English dancer who married him, became his *companera* through the times that tried men's souls (and women's, too) to the ultimate breaking point; and then, as his widow, had the infinitely more arduous task of telling his story to the world, becoming in her turn another kind of symbol, of the unfinished business of Victor and his comrades, a focus for all the exiled democrats who needed her certainty that they would, one day, return. The very reticence of her story gives it added strength, and increases still further the respect one has for her and her assassinated love.

She would be the first to deny any great theoretical wisdom — she once told me to remember that she was not really a political thinker — and yet in the very concreteness of the story she tells there are important political lessons, though sometimes alluded to almost obliquely, as if she hesitated to point the moral. For instance, she draws valuable comparisons between the student movement in Chile and elsewhere in 1968:

> '. . . By May, telegrams of solidarity were being exchanged with the students in Paris and other universities around the world, but what was happening in Chile was different, I think, from the situation in other countries. While in France, for example, the French Communist party and the trade union movement remained outside the students' uprising, in Chile the leaders of the reform in both the University of Chile and in the State Technical University were communists, both in the student movement and among the academics. . .'

Similarly, when Victor came face to face with American hippies, he saw past the long hair and CIA-inspired obsession with drugs, and recognised the radical inspiration for their somewhat naive critique of the American way of death:

> 'It seems to me that the hippies are a normal and justifiable reaction against this sinisterly hygienic and mechanised world. . . The American people are imprisoned in a kind of plastic cage which crushes them with its own weight.'

If the European Left had got so readily to the heart of what was going on among the students, and acted to help them graduate from their infantile ultra-leftism to a truly politicised alliance with the organised working class, the history of what has become known as Eurocommunism might have been rather different.

In Britain too, we are struggling (and, so far, failing, it must be admitted) to find a peaceful road to socialism; we, too, have a powerful folk culture that is either transmuted into the base metal of Morris dancing tourist attractions or written off as relics of a bygone, superseded age; we, too, have a popular culture increasingly dominated by the values of the market economy, where the fast buck once again rules over the artistic impulse; we, too, have accomplished artists who do not see that their work should be informed by any understanding of the political crossroads upon which our country stands.

It is the great power of Joan Jara's book that it has a relevance to all these issues without in any way becoming didactic or polemical, and though it does not address itself specifically to them, one cannot fail to see their significance, at the same time as one is moved to what one young British folk singer, Rory McLeod, called an 'angry love' at the terrible story.

Thank you, Joan, for having the courage

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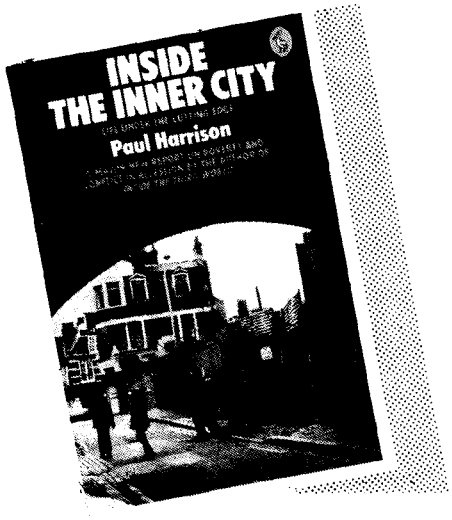
to continue Victor's 'unfinished song' after his death, and for telling us his story in a manner that cannot fail to inspire us and steel our sometimes blunted purpose in these grim years. I have put this one on my bookshelf alongside Julius Fucik's *Notes from the Gallows*, by Gorki's *Mother*, by *Naked Among Wolves*.

As the German anti-fascists used to say in the 30s, the darker the night, the brighter the stars. Victor and Joan Jara's stars still shine bright for all of us.

Karl Dallas



INSIDE THE INNER CITY: LIFE UNDER THE CUTTING EDGE
Paul Harrison
Pelican 1983 £3.95 pbk
ISBN 0 14 02 2419x

For many people who read this book it will confirm their worst fears about life in a British inner city area. From the unemployed to the Asian businessmen, from the refuse worker to the secretary, almost any of the inhabitants you choose lives their life under continuous pressure, under the 'cutting edge'. Each case history that Paul Harrison presents seems to exude a physical and mental tension which is only just under individual and collective boiling point. At least that's the impression conveyed in his writing and in the way he portrays these riders on the storm of the urban crisis; out on the streets, on the estates, in the sweatshops.

Inside the Inner City represents a two year voyage into the heartland of this urban crisis. Harrison has succeeded in describing a picture of the marginalised sections of the Hackney people who (according to government and EEC statistics) live in the most deprived of our inner cities. He puts human flesh on the statistical bones of this deprivation in the London Borough of Hackney, and for this, albeit with reservations, his book will become a benchmark in poverty studies.

Writing the history of urban expansion Harrison describes an all too familiar pattern of disparate and random growth of the inner city; he clearly exposes the absence of any concept of development which bears an imprint of human social need or rationality. The 'rationality' which governed this growth and provides its direction, now as then, is the familiar if still misunderstood impact of 'market forces'. The cycle of industrial, commercial and trading patterns, regulated by supply and demand, and its necessary labour resourcing, locates the populations of the inner city at the centre of a constant restructuring. The effects of this uneven process have been shattering. Harrison plumps for a decisive 'hour which came and went': the result of a developing rail network bypassing the inner city on to the suburbs beyond. Those that could afford to, moved up and onwards to ever greener pastures of respectability and security. And it is this inexorable movement in consumer affluence which has left us with the present social formation of today's inner city.

A real weakness of the book is that the appalling structure of poverty in contemporary Hackney becomes the object of policies conceived only on the basis of spending more public expenditure. But the problem of 'social wage slavery' is not only about the money received in the weekly giro. It is also about politics; it is here the analysis is less firm. The central issue of contemporary urban life is the inability to develop an alternative to 'subalternity'; that is to say, the people portrayed implicitly and explicitly in the book are victims, a class of citizens to whom things happen; hopeless beings trapped by their inability to become protagonists able to exert their own will over events, other social forces and institutions. It is a politics which superimposes new strategic goals and forms of struggle upon the political terrain of the inner city that is needed. For each class fraction, racial group, sex and social group in the inner city will have to come to terms with their own self-organisation and political advocacy. They must also recognise that political power rests on competence as well as effort; the competencies of government in the broadest sense, in self-administration, in involvement and participation, in popular administration and strategic and tactical political calculation. This learning through experience must come through politic ideological and economic combat.

The fatal weakness in the book's analys is the inability to perceive that such abilitie do exist amongst the citizens in their soci and political movements in the inner cit Instead of examining what is possibl within the current situation we ar constantly told what is impossible. It is th depressing overstatement which seems t close off the alternatives for change tha exist despite a Conservative governmen Isn't this argument ultimately saying tha things will only get better when a differen (Labour) government gets elected so tha they will do the right things for the peopl in the inner city? If so, it is a classi restatement of social democratic politics one very much in evidence on the hard lef of Labour, today's left social democrats.

Historically, Labour has attempted t resolve urban crises through various centra government initiatives. Under the 1974- Labour government this took the form o the Urban Programme which gave borough such as Hackney 'Partnership Status'. Thi status was an attempt to reorientate mai line programmes of central and loca government expenditure, to coordinate th local state agencies of health, education an the local councils with the Department o the Environment, bringing them togethe with the rapidly expanded voluntary sector Six years later this approach has all bu failed in its objective of a strategic attemp to clear up inner city deprivation. Th categories of 'social need' and 'economi development' which the Urban Programm sought to impose on Partnership Authoritie have become a bureaucratic straightjacke and the relevant agencies still operate in a self-interested and divergent way; th voluntary sector has become tied to a funding process that effectively sets them against each other and the much sough after strategy of coordination has beer unsuccessful. Harrison's book partially investigates this experiment and as h shows, despite the very best endeavours or behalf of town hall administrations, w are still waiting for a policy that works. T take Peter Shore's words, 'Taking th postwar period as a whole, the mos striking thing has been. . . the failure o public policy to recognise the central fact o the economic decline of the inner city'.

Paul Harrison's book provides th stimulus for new inquiries but it won' provide the alternatives for a radical urban politics for the 1980s.

Alan MacDougal

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VIEWPOINT

Labour's Lost Millions

Eric Hobsbawm's article in the October issue has provoked much debate Here we publish two responses — with more to follow in December.

MICHAEL MEACHER: Wide ranging reappraisal

Eric Hobsbawm has earned himself an unenviable reputation in some parts of the Left, mainly because of his dalliance with coalition with the SDP. But that shouldn't blind us to assessing his critique of the reasons behind Labour's disastrous defeat.

He is surely right that it was not simply due to changes in the social structure, to the numerical decline of the working class, or even to its growing sectionalism. He is right that potential Labour voters desperately needed convincing of the arguments behind the flag-waving labels of CND, EEC and AES, yet there was an almost total absence of any serious campaigning on the issues till far too late, indeed till the election was called. He is also surely right that a defeat as grave as 9 June necessitates the most rigorous self-criticism for the Party from which nothing can be excluded, and certainly not policy.

He is right too that it would be ridiculous to sit back and insist we already have the 'correct' line and that it's simply a matter of the electorate catching up with us — but whoever took such a caricatured position? It would be equally foolish, though he doesn't say so, to go to the other extreme and claim we must drop everything which has been thoroughly debated and fought for over the years and start again from scratch.

Lost credibility

In my view it would be wrong to read the last election as in any way a blanket rejection of Labour's policies (though certain *perceptions* of policy, eg that Labour would unilaterally disarm and leave the country defenceless, or that home ownership was opposed, were — hardly surprisingly — wholly rejected). What happened was I believe rather subtler, namely that Labour lost credibility long before the election as a serious political force with pretensions to government, as a result of prolonged and destructive internal wrangling, an almost unqualifiedly negative and hostile image in the media, and a complete abdication from any systematic campaigning role. Consequently the policies were not so much weighted in the balance by the electorate and found wanting, as lost by default as the property of a party that clearly had no hope of winning.

That it isn't the precise policies of a party that matter, but rather its general *image*, is clearly shown by the astonishingly abrupt return to favour of the Labour Party at the end of its recent Annual Conference. There were no major shifts on policy, not even on unilateralism, yet a consistent presentation of unity and a new charismatic leadership suddenly propelled the party from third place in recent polls to neck-and-neck with the Tories for the first time in two years.

Now none of this is to imply complacency or to suggest there is no need for the most searching scrutiny of every aspect of our functioning as a political party — policies, leadership, organisation, campaigning, communications, for a start. Every one of them can undoubtedly be improved, and most of them considerably, and each must now be subjected as an absolute priority to the most careful, comprehensive, hard-headed analysis of what should now be done in each area.

Let me suggest a few ideas. On policy I believe we need a much more high-powered means of preparing our programme, drawing more widely and systematically on the skills, knowledge and experience of specialists within our movement — whether it is detailing what we mean by a non-nuclear defence strategy, an effective anti-poverty strategy, a policy on energy and ecology, or the regulation of finance capital.

As to our main policy priorities, I believe we have over-targeted on nuclear weapons, the Common Market and alternative economics. It is as though we have gone on fighting the internal Labour Party Left-Right issues right through the election, instead of turning full-focus on to other strategic issues where socialism confronts Thatcherism. Among the latter I would certainly bring up-front for campaigning for defence of the welfare state, industrial democracy and co-operatives for the advancement of worker power, a hard-headed commitment to redistribution of income and wealth, a determined attack on class inequalities and privilege, and a task force against low pay and poverty.

On campaigning, I believe the Party should appoint a senior full-time campaigns officer, and must support the proposal to establish a new NEC Campaigns Committee to oversee and co-ordinate a series of major, well-planned campaigns over the next few years.

My prescription is therefore the relentless scrutiny and upgrading of all aspects of the Party as an effective political force, and I believe its renewal and revitalisation on that basis is perfectly feasible. Eric Hobsbawm apparently believes that such strategy has had its day, and recommends as an alternative model Franco-Spanish 'neo-socialism' (ie, abandonment of the traditional mass party in favour of a common electoral front of all those interested in reforms) or the Italian PCI's continuing and largely successful adaptiveness to changing social conditions. We would be foolish not to try to learn from their achievements, but the crucial fact is we retain certain priceless assets which they, regrettably, don't have — notably the commitment of a united trade union movement — and that in my view still dictates a rather different and distinctive socialist strategy in Britain.

ROBIN COOK: Getting out of the hole

My first quarrel with Hobsbawm's analysis is that, either to spare our feelings or to avoid his own depression, he is not sufficiently brutal in measuring the scale of Labour's defeat. In June we suffered not a defeat, but a rout. Across a broad swathe of England from Norwich to Penzance Labour received a bare 11% of the popular vote in those constituencies outside London. Almost one third of the population of Britain now lives within that electoral desert, and it is inconceivable that we can establish a socialist government unless we secure support for it from those regions. Even in London the third of the vote obtained by Labour was lower than the third enjoyed by the Party of the Left in any major capital city of Europe.

The arithmetic of recovery is equally sobering. Labour must win a minimum of 120 seats to achieve even the hair's breadth parliamentary majority of October 1974, but we are now in second place in only 126 seats. In other words we must win virtually every seat in which we are now second — which includes such traditionally Tory

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adels as Margaret Thatcher's own nstituency of Finchley.

It is important to be honest with rselves about the gravity of our electoral isis, because measuring the depth of our le is a pre-condition of climbing out of it. e must therefore put aside such mforting delusions as the information at our defeat was a victory in which 8½ illion people consciously voted for a ogramme of red blooded socialism. This oposition contains two separate fallacies.

The first relates to the motivation of our maining electors. The most common ason offered for voting Labour was ertia. Try as I might it was well-nigh ipossible to uncover a voter who had iosen Labour because s/he was excited by ir policies or animated by our leaders. verwhelmingly electors explained a vote r Labour on the grounds that they had ways been Labour, frequently offering iis honourable statement defensively ither than with pride. A party that relies r its support on inertia is a party that will on run out of momentum.

The second relates to the nature of the arty's programme. There is every reason hy the Left should repel attacks from the ight on the policies embedded in our ecent manifesto — and the Brighton onference demonstrated that there is no opular support in the movement for such evisionism. There is absolutely no reason hy the Left itself should reveal such iarked complacency over the particular ix of policies contained in the recent ianifesto.

The harsh truth is that the balance of the olicies it contained — and therefore opular perception of them — contained najor flaws. We came across as resoundingly negative. Every voter knew we were gainst council house sales, the Common Market, and the bomb. Few knew, or were given much chance to discover, what positive policies we would put in their place. Even the AES became reduced to being against unemployment.

Moreover an inevitable aspect of our negativism was an embarrassing insularity. The outside world only surfaced in the mainstream of our programme as alien and threatening forces — American missiles, Brussels bureaucracy, Japanese imports. No sustained attempt was made to link up our economic prescriptions with those of other progressive governments in Europe to build a common programme of reflation. Virtually no reference was made to the debt crisis in the Third World, although it offered Labour an interesting opening for a common threat against IMF neo-imperialism.

The insularity of our message was electorally significant because it lent credibility to Thatcher's persistent innuendos that socialism was some kind of anachronistic creed that survived in a fossilised state only in the British Labour Party. Not only did she get away with it, but we let her get away with it at a time when half of Europe is ruled by a socialist government, some of whom are taking quite exciting radical initiatives.

We need not be surprised that public perception of our manifesto was unfavourable, because it was drawn from Labour's programme 1982, which was explicitly prepared not as an instrument for persuading the public to elect a Labour government but as a meticulous Von Schlieffen plan for the lifetime of the next Labour government which everyone took for granted. Here we come to much the most curious aspect of Labour's defeat. Throughout the preceding four years of opposition the Labour Party had neither shown any recognition of the possibility of defeat nor taken any action to avert it.

Internal preoccupation

It is not sufficient to blame those in the movement with access to the media for airing our private differences in TV studios in front of audiences of millions. It is necessary also to admit that the whole clutch of activist organisations spawned during the period were created in order to campaign solely among the narrow constituency of existing activists — CLPD, RFMB, LLC82, even LCC although it came to recognise the need to campaign outside the Party as well as within it. Despite the rhetoric of mass campaigning, the reality of much of this activism was committee politics, of which the battlefield was the branch meeting and victory was the mandating of delegates. The reason why those on the Left most prominent in their struggles now find themselves, to their bewilderment, marginalised in the post-election period is because their solutions, tactics, and rhetoric were all tailored to the internal struggle and they have no answers to offer a Party membership that now hungers to know how to build for an electoral victory.

The same studied indifference to building electoral success was reflected in the most exalted party committee of all, the NEC. Hobsbawm is right to dismiss organisational failure as inadequate to explain the scale of our reverse, but the patent inability of our central headquarters to manage an election campaign is revealing about the priorities of those who had been in charge over the preceding years. Our dismal impact on the media was prefigured by our failure to maintain a full-time broadcasting officer in the run up to the election. We need not expect to be the party of the masses if we refuse to come to terms with the mass media.

Here I find grounds for being more optimistic than Hobsbawm about the future, even though I am more pessimistic than him about the departure point. If we can retain 200 seats without even trying it should not be impossible to win 300 seats if — but only if — we really set our minds to it. This leads me to two points where I disagree with premises which, although not explicitly stated by Hobsbawm, appear to hover in the background of his exposition.

A little optimism

First I am much more implacable than Hobsbawm appears to be about any accommodation with the Alliance. This appears to me undesirable not just because of the obvious — the unanswerable — political objections, but because it is not even apparent that it would be to our electoral advantage. The general election results demonstrate that Labour supporters are distressingly willing to vote tactically where the Alliance candidate may beat the Tory, but there is not the slightest indication that Alliance voters are prepared to vote tactically for a Labour candidate. This would suggest that the only party to benefit from any anti-Thatcher pact would be the Alliance.

Thus we have no alternative with the Alliance but war to the knife. Hobsbawm is absolutely right that Thatcher cannot be unseated while the opposition vote is evenly split, but precisely because of that our first task over the next two years must be to capture the mass base of the Alliance, as the pre-condition of displacing the government.

Secondly I am unsettled by a certain whiff of determinism that appears to hang over the writings of Hobsbawm and others about Labour's decline. There is no *a priori* reason why a higher standard of living for the masses need result in erosion of support for collectivist values. It is notable that socialist parties continue to do markedly better than Labour in Scandinavia, France or Austria, which enjoy greater prosperity, and other socialist parties are thriving in Spain and Italy which are currently overhauling British standards of living. Arguably the regression in Britain to an ugly and unenlightened counter-revolution is not a product of material progress, but a consequence of our economic stagnation.

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Letters

EW ALLIANCES

ic Hobsbawm is to be congratulated on : frankness and clarity with which he dresses the problems of Labour's cline. May I, as a Liberal, who has long ight a fundamental regrouping on the ft, make a few comments?

The first arises from the election result. ie effect of June 9, and the realignment it has so far occurred, is to rule out the ospect of a majority Labour government the foreseeable future (even under the isting electoral system).

Labour will not now automatically ract the votes of those who feel that the ghest priority should be keeping the ries out of office. In many parts of the untry a Labour vote is a wasted vote. As consequence, the opportunities for alogue and the construction of broader iances on the Left are greatly increased. iere is now a considerable urgency and nging for such a debate.

My second comment concerns Labour rty chauvinism. Surely members of the ? should be as aware as Liberals that the ıcompromising exclusivity of Labour is e major obstacle to a broader alliance on e Left. Witness Benn's view that anyone ıo moves outside the Tories should filiate to Labour lest they be forgotten, or e sneering complacency with which so any Labour members view 'non-cialists'.

Finally, may I humbly send a message to e CP? Articles and theory are fine, deed essential. The Party must neverthe-ss loosen the ties with the 'Labour left' if s initiatives are to carry conviction. Try arching us out in the Liberal Party. Parts the SDP will also be interested.

Alan Leaman, London
Liberator *magazine*

MISTAKEN IDENTITY

The photograph which appeared in the Oct issue of *Marxism Today*, (p28) purporting to show members of the British Union of Fascists is incorrect, as the BUF was not formed until after the failure of Mosley's New Party in 1931. Possibly they were members of the Imperial Fascist League — or was the date wrong?

Sid Gregory, London

HOUSING MOBILITY

One factor in the housing problem seems rarely mentioned — the need for mobility of labour. Employed or unemployed, skilled, unskilled, or professional, we now have to go where the work is rather than find work where we live. In a complex modern society work is increasingly specialised and is rarely available indefinitely in one particular place. This means that workers may change their place of work many times in their working life, and promotion will nearly always involve a move. When this means selling one house and buying another it involves far more expense and hassle than a mere change of tenancy would.

Just when the need for mobility is becoming increasingly apparent home ownership is spreading to include workers who would never have dreamed of owning a house in the previous century. Rising rents and diminishing controls have made it almost as cheap to buy as to rent, and the government has deliberately encouraged this by forcing up rents and depleting the stock of rented accommodation available. Surely a socialist government should seek to reverse this trend and encourage tenancy, whether from the state or by cooperatives.

Connie Ford, Nottingham

We welcome your letters for the December issue. They should be no longer than 200 words and arrive at the office not later than Friday 5 November.

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Robert Taylor works for Greenpeace.
Cathy Lloyd works for Westminster Trades Council researching the police and public order.
Ferdi Dennis is a journalist on *City Limits* and has taught in Nigeria.
Jenny Pearce is the author of *Under the Eagle: US intervention in Central America and the Caribbean.*
Andrew Gamble is the author of *Britain in Decline* and lecturer in politics at Sheffield University.
Cynthia Cockburn is a researcher at City University, London, supported by the Equal Opportunities Commission and the SSRC.
George Melly is the author of *Revolt into Style* and *Owning up*, and a well-known jazz performer.
Simon Frith is the author of *Sound Effects* and the *Sunday Times* rock critic.
For **CP roundtable** participants see p26.
Peter Preston is the editor of the *Guardian.*
Mike Power is a printworker at the *Daily Mail.*
Thomas O'Malley works for Local Radio Workshop.
Marek Kahn writes for the music press.
Paul Allen is a broadcaster.
Karl Dallas wrote the popular song 'The Family of Man' and was the first folk correspondent of *Melody Maker.*
Alan Macdougall is a member of the political research unit of Hackney Council, and the CP Hackney Borough Committee.
Michael Meacher is a member of the Labour Party NEC.
Robin Cook is Labour MP for Livingston, Edinburgh.
Erratum **Brenda Kirsch** wrote in her personal capacity in the last issue.

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Update

PUBLICATIONS

Europe's Folly Published by CND this is the most complete guide to the cruise missile — the technology, the history, the politics and the strategy. Price £1.95 it is available from bookshops or from CND Sales, Dept DR 227 Seven Sisters Road, London N4 (add 30p for p&p).

Viewpoint, a Pakistani magazine. The only progressive weekly in Pakistan, it gives a regular survey of happenings in Pakistan and is the only journal to report consistently on the repression of women. Available from Central Books, 37 Grays Inn Road WC1, or subscriptions from Viewpoint, 4 Lawrence Road, Lahore, Pakistan.

CONFERENCES

History Workshop Conference 11-13 Nov. An annual conference which provides the opportunity for professionals and anyone interested in socialist and feminist history to discuss their work. Also films, plays, exhibitions, social and concert. At Manchester Polytechnic, All Saints, Manchester 15. Fee is £7.00, students and unwaged £3.50. Unemployed and OAPs free. Information from History Workshop 17, 47 Albany Road, Manchester 21.

South Africa Today and Tomorrow 12 Nov. All day conference organised by the University of Nottingham Department of Adult Education, to examine the current situation in South Africa, Britain's attitude to it and the role of trade unions in an apartheid society. Fee is £3.00, £1.50 unwaged. Pre-enrolment necessary from the University Adult Education Centre, Shakespeare Street, Nottingham, tel Nottingham 473022 or John Morgan, Nottingham 56101 ex 3207.

Communist Party History Group 19 Nov. Victor Kierman and Richard Saville, Marxism and History, the first hundred years. Star Club, 44 Carlton Place, Glasgow 2.00pm to 6.00pm. All welcome.

Men and Childcare 26 Nov. A one day workshop for women, young people and men. Organised by the Men and Childcare Group. It will critically examine men's involvement in the care of children both within the family and outside. At the Drill Hall, Chenies Street, London WC1 10am to 6 pm. Access for wheelchairs. Contact Dick at 01-326 0240.

Falklands Futures 26 Nov. A one day conference, the first of a series designed to open up public debate on the various scenarios facing Commonwealth countries and associated states or crown colonies. Fee is £5.00. Organised by the Commonwealth Institute, to be held in the Jehangir Room, 9.45am to 5.00pm. Full details 01-602 3252.

The Working Class Family 26 Nov. A conference combined with the AGM of the Society for the Study of Labour History. It will examine current thinking about the history of the working class family and its relationship with the labour movement. Creche available. Entry free. To be held at the Latchmore Adult Education Centre, Latchmore road, London SW11.

EVENTS

Teaching About the Caribbean 1-5 Nov. An exhibition of books and teaching material aimed at teachers and others concerned about encouraging greater awareness of cultural diversity of the Caribbean peoples. Organised by the Commonwealth Institute; to be held in Jehangir Board Rooms, Commonwealth Institute, Kensington High St, London W8. From 10.00am to 7.00pm every day except Friday, 10.00am to 5.00pm. Further information from 01-603 4535.

Women and textiles — their lives and their work 11-13 Nov. A weekend of events organised by the Women's Arts Slide Library. Exhibition also throughout Nov at the Battersea Arts Centre, London.

Labour's Lost Millions 10 Nov. Eric Hobsbawm and Dave Priscott are the major speakers at a meeting to discuss the decline of the Labour Party and prospects for the future. Organised by Marxism Today and the West Yorkshire Area Committee of the Communist Party. 7.30pm Trades Council Club, Saville Mount, Leeds 7. Small admission charge. Further information from Bill Innes Leeds 458675.

Women's Day For Sport 12 Nov. A wide range of sporting activities incorporating those for the disabled and elderly will be available to women on this day free or for a minimum charge, at 20 sports centres in or around Greater London. Promoted by the GLC Women's Committee with the support of the Sports Council. The aim is to encourage women to approach local sports centres in an environment they will find more congenial and to alert sports centre managers to the needs of women of all abilities. Creches will be provided in most venues. For information or publicity materials contact Beverly Huie or Anne Graham 01-633 1114.

Tribute to Wilfred Burchett 22 Nov. A film by John Pilger of an interview with this famous war correspondent, the only western journalist to be allowed into N Vietnam during the war, will be shown. Among those speaking will be James Cameron, Sam Russell and John Pilger. To be held in the Grand Committee Room, the House of Commons at 7.30pm. Apply for invitations to Joan Yuille, British Vietnam Association, 52 St Johns Park, London SE3 or phone 01-858 7930.

Annual Ideas Fair 26 Nov. This is for anyone with an idea they want to put across. Exhibitors welcome from organisations or individuals. To be held at North Herts College, Broadway, Letchworth, Herts. Organised by Davids Bookshop 04626 4631.

The Isaac Deutscher Memorial Lecture 28 Nov. Geoffrey E M de Ste Croix, author of *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*, will speak on 'Karl Marx and the interpretation of Greek and Roman History' 7.30pm at The London School of Economics, New Theatre.

Black Film Making Initiative in Birmingham Varying levels of institutionalised racism prevents Britain's black population from careers in film and television. To alleviate some of these barriers, Birmingham Film Workshop and W Midlands Ethnic Minority Arts Service are establishing a black film production workshop. The project combines support from the National Film School and Channel Four and is backed also by ACTT and by the BFI. A mix of training, debate, production and exhibition will characterise this initiative. Further information from Laxine Jandagne 021-523 7544 or Roger Shannon 021-359 5545.

Access to Snowdonia Access to footpaths in the Snowdonia National Park is in dispute. The Welsh Committee of the British Mountaineering Council, concerned to maintain their legal status as rights of way, are collecting information on their use. Those who regularly use these routes are asked to keep a record of when they have walked on them. Evidence forms for this purpose listing all the 50 paths are available from Mrs Esme Kirby, Dytfryn Mynbr, Capel Curig, Betws-Y -Coed.

CAMPAIGNS

Women in Iran Women imprisoned in Iran for political activity who face torture and the death penalty need donations urgently to help them and possibly buy them out of prison. Cheques should be made payable to the Iranian Womens Support group, Farzand c/o Spare Rib, 27 Clerkenwell Close, London EC1.

FILMS, VIDEO

Films at Work A new socialist film group is showing an 8 week series of films which confront the historical problems of working life, with speakers to lead discussions. 31 Oct 'Harlem County USA', 6 Nov 'Saturday Night and Sunday Morning', 13 Nov 'Salt of the Earth', 20 Nov 'Finally Got the News', 27 Nov 'The Filleting Machine'. To be held at Jackson Lane Community Centre, 271 Archway Road, London N6 at 7.30pm, £1.50, UB40s 80p.

Labouring under the Law This is a video which examines the implications of the Tory Employment Acts in the context of 150 years of trade union legislation. Available for sale or hire from the Northern Film and Television Archives, 36 Bottlebank, Gateshead, Tyne and Wear tel 0632 775532.

Entries for the December update should be sent as soon as possible (latest date Friday 4 November) to Maria Loftus, Marxism Today 16 St John Street London EC1 or tel 01-251 4406 or 01-607 3344 (evenings).

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